



## INTERVIEW WITH DWIGHT BURLINGAME – MARCH 7, 2013

*Our State of Generosity*, a project of the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy (JCP) at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), in partnership with the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF), Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA), Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC), and GVSU Libraries' Special Collections & University Archives present:

An interview with Dwight Burlingame on March 7, 2013. Conducted by Kathryn Agard, primary author and interviewer for *Our State of Generosity*. Recorded via telephone. This interview is part of a series in the project, *Our State of Generosity* (OSoG). OSoG is a partnership of scholars, practitioners, and funders from four institutions – the Johnson Center; CMF; MNA; and MCSC – that collectively form the backbone of the state's philanthropic, voluntary, and nonprofit infrastructure. OSoG's mission is to capture, preserve, analyze, and share the developments, achievements, and experience that, over a period of 40 years, made Michigan a State of Generosity.

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Abridged: The following interview has been edited to assist readability. Extraneous verbal pauses and informal personal conversation not related to the topic of Michigan philanthropy have been deleted. Footnotes to the transcript have been added clarifying any factual errors in the memory of the person interviewed.

Text of the interview questions are as asked. Individuals interviewed have had the opportunity to add or edit their answers in order to provide their most accurate answers to the questions. For these reasons, the edited transcript may not exactly reflect the recorded interview.

Kathy Agard (KA): So to get started, I don't know if you can recall your pre-Michigan involvement [Laughter] but when you first started in the field, going back, do you know what your general impressions were of what was happening in Michigan's philanthropic community? Generally, what did you think about what was happening in Michigan?

Dwight Burlingame (DB): Well, my most – pre-being involved – are we talking about now?

(KA): Yeah. Which should be many years ago...

(DB): Being involved with MCFYP [Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project]?

(KA): Yeah, Okay.

(DB): I'll put it in that context. My impressions were formulated [00:01:00] with the engagement that I had with the Kellogg Foundation when I was at Bowling Green State University. In that capacity, I happened to be engaged with various programs in my advising with the leadership program of Kellogg Foundation, and it was in that capacity that I learned a lot about what Kellogg was doing and what was going on in Michigan.

Well, it was through really Lorraine Matusak, [00:02:00] who was the director of that program at the time. Lorraine and I knew each other from way back 1974 to '78. We were both deans at the University of Evansville. She left there and some years later became the director of the program in leadership at the foundation. It was through conversations with her – I learned about people like Dottie Johnson and the Michigan Grantmakers Association as one of the best in the country. And that the leadership being provided in the state, particularly by Kellogg and by Mott and by Kresge, were the ones that were in my forefront as a [00:03:00] dean associated with what was going on in Michigan.

(KA): Okay. Well, when – I'm gonna skip and just kind of move in to this one a bit. So I know that you have had lots of opportunity since then to deal with Dottie and Russ and all of the Michigan crew.

(DB): Right.

(KA): One of the things that we've been trying to tease out is the actual specifics about their leadership style, and examples that could be used as teaching examples if you were talking with your students about *here's sort of how it's done*. So can you talk a little bit about what you've observed of the Michigan leadership and the kinds of things that they have done that you think you would like to emulate, or that you talk with your students about emulating?

(DB): Well, one that comes immediate to mind is the leadership style of Russ Mawby, and his engagement and involvement with building future leadership influenced by his own [00:04:00] work in 4-H – Well, I think 4-H but he may have been involved in FFA [Future Farmers of America], I don't know. From my perspective, it was the notion of the 4-H model and that leadership model that was particularly illustrative to me since I was a 4-Her. So that engagement with the clientele or the consumer or the grant recipient, or the people in the communities, wherever they might be, in a more informal style and not an *I'm-on-the-top* [00:05:00] dictatorial kind of style.

When one thinks about that – and some might even call it folksy, [Laughter] but there are those elements that I think were so grounded in the interest of people and was in the best interest for the community, and how to maximize that potential is what I would give as an example for my students about his particular leadership style that I experienced. Another is the case of Dottie Johnson, the getting the job done and not having obstacles in the way or not being able to overcome those obstacles with an attitude of, *well, we're not going to change this*, but [00:06:00] with such an attitude that *we can make a difference and we can change this*.

That has always impressed me about her in terms of her approach and she goes about getting it done. [Laughter] That characteristic of leadership is – by the actions that she does and has done in the past – at least again from my experience, I have been impressed with and would give as examples for other students.



(KA): Great. Well, I know that you have looked at the growth of philanthropy all over the world and we're trying to capture the degree of significance, I would say, of what has happened in Michigan over the last 40 years. And because we're inside of it, it's hard to... we're proud, of course, of what we've done. Whether we are looking at it saying, "*Oh, wow, Michigan is really different,*" or whether from the outside it's not really different, it's just, you know, it's a [00:07:00] case study rather than an exemplar? Or is it an exemplar and things have happened here that could be identified and be replicated? [Laughter]

(DB): I think to me, Michigan has been an exemplar in the infrastructure organization leadership that's been evident, which has been number one. And two, the luxury of have – no – I don't want to call it luxury. I mean the gift of major foundation assets which have been instrumental in engaging communities across the state. So the community foundation movement in a large way, in the last [00:08:00] 30 years was so advanced by your work and we, of course, picked up on that and ran with it in Indiana ("we" meaning Lilly Endowment). The leadership in Youth in Philanthropy I think is an exemplar on how engaging youth particularly in – well I think not just particularly, but most often through – the leadership initiative in the community foundations across the state.

The grantmaking program of the Kellogg Foundation for education and support of the development of philanthropic and non-profit sector education, I think, has historically been one of the most important contributions in our field.

(KA): Yes.

(DB): But, historically, that has certainly been an exemplar.

(KA): Okay, good. Thanks. That kind of leads to the area that I had skipped over earlier just to follow the flow. But it seemed to me that especially during the period of this expansion, if you will, or the development of the field in maybe the last 20 years, that there is an unusual relationship between the Lilly Endowment and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, or that there used to be, or that there's at least a good collegial feeling. Can you talk a little bit about [00:10:00] how those big private foundations do or don't? I mean am I wrong about that or am I right about that? And then also how they have shaped the field either individually or together?

(DB): I think that's been very true in the beginning actually, in about 1990, when the Kellogg Foundation and the Lilly Endowment came together along with the anonymous donor...

KA): Oh, the Atlantic Philanthropies person?

(DB): Yeah. Feeney.

(KA): Sure.

(DB): [00:11:00] It was actualized, in terms of this partnership, really because of Russ Mawby, the new president of the Lilly Endowment, Clay Robbins, and then the other representative from that meeting with Robert Payton. They came together as a group, talking quite regularly, and talking about what needed to be done in terms of growth of philanthropy and philanthropy education in particular. I think it was because of those individuals and the mix of them and, again, between Payton and the other three, it really



[00:12:00] helped develop this synergy and collaboration between Kellogg Foundation and Lilly Endowment in particular.

And then they actually had an interest in the Midwest. I mean Lilly has been pretty focused on Indiana, and just a couple of national programs and the most notable, of course, Religion and Philanthropy. This particular association I think was very much built upon this Midwestern value and ethic of the role of philanthropy.

(KA): Great, great. That's really helpful. Thank you. Kind of moving along with that, you've been involved with a whole lot of the projects that have gone across the border (I always used to laugh that I was an honorary Hoosier – at least it felt that way): the two [00:13:00] centers on philanthropy, the fact that the university has worked out a collaborating relationship on the archives and community foundations that you mentioned, youth involvement, and Learning to Give. Can you talk a little bit about the process of sharing between the two states and the relationships that have developed at our level? I mean at the staff level.

(DB): Right. Well I think, number one, it begins with the mutual interest and the trust in each other – the individuals, the players, the actors in these respective organizations. I personally think without that, these would have not developed nearly to what they are in earning the trust of each other. I think that's been very true historically with my involvement with the Michigan folks, namely you, and others. In terms of these programs over the years, I [00:14:00] think that has been an important foundation on which we were as successful as we could be. In spite of all of the other activities which might have been further enlarged that we got interrupted with the progress we were making sometimes by some other more what I'm going to call "self-focus." That is to say [Laughter] either within the state, or among our two states, or within the organization, we're coming at this from building a better field for both of us (that is, both Michigan and Indiana) and ultimately the country and the world.

Partnerships are always difficult. We had one example in this relationship between the two states really which was more of a shotgun marriage – that Lilly Endowment had funded the initial activity of Habits of the Heart.

(KA): Yup.

(DB): With the Indiana Humanities Council and there we had an actor in the role of the director who clearly was not in the same mode of collaboration. Consequently, it was not nearly as successful, I think, as it could have been. Otherwise, I [00:16:00] think we really had great success which was built on this attitude that we had the people who were in the right jobs at the right time. A lesson that comes out of that is the importance of having a mindset in terms of what's good for the field as a whole before one looks selfishly at *how am I going to survive in the organization that I'm in* kind of approach.

(KA): Great, great. Yes, because when I think about the history, there were lots of bombs. I mean in places where everything could have gone...

(DB): Right.



(KA): Not only the Habits of the Heart where we all looked at each other and said, “How did you get into my grant,” you know? [Laughter]

(DB): Right. [Laughter]

(KA): But with the problems with Learning to Give and the natural tendency toward competition that there could have been between the centers. And you guys are so great about not letting that get in the way of collaboration. So it’s interesting to me about how despite the fact [00:17:00] that there were places where things could have really gone wrong, people stuck with it and stuck with the relationship and there are still good feelings. So I think you’ve captured something good there.

(DB): Right, and you know we had a challenge on this end.

(KA): Yeah.

(DB): Competition can often not be conducive to collaboration.

(KA): Yeah and you don’t know whether that can be mentored out. I mean, I try to think about, *Okay, was a whole generation just mentored with this kind of attitude or ...?*

(DB): Right.

(KA): “Did people come in naturally or...” One of our concerns in the project – frankly, Dwight – is how do we make sure that what we [00:18:00] have had continues, and that in the next generation of leadership that comes up, somehow this stays with the field.... that this is about philanthropy and not about winning.

(DB): The background of the leadership is much more focused on the competitive kind of approach. I’ve often wondered [00:20:00] if the number of MBAs in this cycle of the new generation, if you will – the mid-40s and 50s who were educated in this time in higher education where it was much more about how you’re going to get to the top. Half of our students at this campus, which is illustrative of around the country, have gone to schools of business in terms of majors, and out of liberal arts and the humanities. Just a higher educational switch in terms of why you’re getting the degree and the focus is much more on the individual and not on the collective.

(KA): So it’s very thoughtful. Thank you. Those are great. I agree with you, I do. The being enamored with the business point of view has always been of concern to me because [00:21:00] it does introduce the competition as just sort of a way of thinking – of being, right? It’s a way of being?

(DB): Right.

(KA): Yes, yes. So you’re headed down this road. Let’s talk a little bit more about – in your time in the field, how have you seen it evolve? I mean what are the differences in the non-profit and philanthropy or the foundation world since you started versus where it is now? Can you reflect a little bit on its change and growth?



(DB): Well, I've certainly seen a change in attitude in higher education on the acceptance of non-profit and charitable philanthropic – let's see, civil society education. That change in terms of acceptance of it as part of teaching the tradition. I think that goes in part because of what has been done, [00:22:00] and led, by Michigan in many ways, with Learning to Give and other activities which changed the attitude of public school education and targeted private K-12 education in thinking about these issues – that when they got to higher education as a consumer, they wanted this. So the faculty in particular had to change their attitude about what curriculum was acceptable or not. I think that acceptance of it – that has been a big change. In public affairs schools across the country, certainly the change of attitude from that it was *just* a public and a private sector. All of political theory and public affairs are built upon the fact that we have two sectors, not three. So the general acceptance of a third sector to be studied and a tradition to be understood, and more recently – at least in my students, [00:23:00] I see - and particularly because of the international, a reemergence of the role of the family or household sector as distinct when we think about delivering services for people in the society. So I think that's been an important change.

So I think we've had that acceptance of the field, one. Both at the K-12 level and as well as in higher education, [00:24:00] and that's been really pushed by the recognition of the organization of the sectors. When you're thinking of the sector and the advocacy infrastructure organizations really starting in the late 70s and early 80s and the movement, and the realization, and the change over those; I think that's been quite dramatic. I think there has really been a big change in that regard.

(KA): Do you think that's for the better? Do you think the field is stronger, healthier, doing a better job at its mission to make the world better?

(DB): Yes, I think it is for the better, because if we didn't have this effort – if there weren't these 300+ programs now across the country which weren't there 25 years ago, there were maybe five. Actually maybe 30 is better. [00:25:00] There were five 30 years ago. I think that has really made a difference because without it, I really think much of the understanding and appreciation of the tradition, not only in this country but around the world, would be lost. Because if we don't teach the traditions either informally or formally, you lose them.

(KA): Dwight, can you comment a little bit about your international work and whether you have found that there is no philanthropy in other countries, or that they define it differently, or that it needs to be surfaced? I mean what has been the crux of your international experience?

(DB): It's everywhere. Philanthropy is everywhere and it's just that it's not named that. And secondly – [00:26:00] I have talked about it wherever it's been in the sense of the understanding of how we care for others in the society, and how we engage with others – what we would define as philanthropy. I believe those traditions are just different in different places in the world but they're all there, and there is the same universal interest in caring for one's fellow beings in a society. This is so true from Africa, in Namibia, where I spent some time; to Japan when teaching in the public school, and just educating what the name was and then how readily sixth graders identified all of their philanthropic acts that they were doing – they just weren't [00:27:00] calling it that. Most recently the China experience is so evident again in how it's emerging in the broader definition of the word here. The experience that they're having in dealing with what we would say the modern foundation movement, and what that means for them now that they have a wealthy class.





I was meeting with a student from China yesterday – I’m on her dissertation committee – and she’s looking at the role of the entrepreneur in China in establishing their corporate foundations in particular. The feeling that they have in terms of why they’re giving, it sounds just like the point of time going back in history when Rockefeller was trying to setup his foundation and the US Congress rejected him, and so he had to go [00:28:00] about doing this in New York; and the attitude of the people of what a wicked man he was, [Laughter] you know? It’s just like the Chinese are now. The wealthy Chinese are having that same feeling in their country, that the people think they’re evil.

(KA): Yeah, so she can get real insight by looking back in time - [Laughter] in some (for us) cultural stuff. That’s great.

(DB): It is. I mean really it just sounds like a story coming right out of 1900.

(KA): Right, right. Well, I want to honor your time because I know how busy you are, but when you were thinking about this conversation, was there anything that you wanted to make sure sort of got on the record or that you would like to make sure gets captured and is known to the next gen, you know? Other generations will be listening to this and also we will be taking some clips. What kinds of things do you want to make sure we get into this interview?

(DB): Well, I’ve mentioned two of them. One is the important leadership role Michigan has played to the [00:29:00] infrastructure organizations – but particularly with CMF and its role and leadership in funding and bringing together the philanthropic community to make a difference. That’s as illustrative of what should go on across the country and, for that matter, around the world; particularly from some of the foundations within Michigan, i.e. Kellogg and Mott in particular. I think the youth question – I would want to be sure that the leadership on Learning to Give and K-12 education is recognized as, again, providing a leadership role for what could be not just in the United States, in this case, but what could be around the world, again in our [00:30:00] understanding and passing on the tradition of what philanthropy is. So I think those two are probably the most important from my perspective.

(KA): Okay, good. Thanks. So then we have, oh, maybe, eight or nine minutes here, but I’d like you to talk a little bit about your philanthropic journey. Just so we know a little bit more about your background; all of us wandered in from somewhere else. Were you raised in philanthropic family? Were your parents volunteers? I know you have kind of an unusual background and...

(DB): Right.

(KA): ...I’d like to get that on the record. [Laughter]

(DB): Well, raised in Minnesota in a rural community on a Native American reservation. My mother was Catholic and she went to the church on the reservation. My father wasn’t, but I had the influence [00:31:00] of the importance of giving from the offering and giving to the poor. We were, of course, the poorest of the poor probably, but still with the attitude – you could always do something. So the requirement of the importance of regularity of giving was certainly imprinted upon me. And then by having to use my gopher tails – [Laughter] I mean my gopher feet money [Laughter] to give ten cents into the Sunday offering. And the only way I could make any money was gopher feet.



(KA): Yup, but I hadn't heard that before. That's great. [Laughter]

(DB): Oh, yeah, I mean – [Laughter] yes, that was my source of revenue as a young child. Then my participation in 4-H was a godsend in providing a way for me in [00:32:00] which I could help the community through the various projects. I was engaged in 4-H for 12 years. So that tradition certainly has stayed with me and shaped my feelings about, maybe not just feelings, but certainly shaped my view on how philanthropy should be both through giving of time and money but also, more importantly, *talent* in terms of addressing the issues in the community.

(KA): Did you go away to school then after high school, Dwight?

(DB): Yes, I went to get my undergraduate degree at Moorhead State University in Minnesota.

(KA): What did you study?

(DB): I became a teacher. I studied political science and business. Then [00:33:00] I taught high school for a year, and then went on to graduate school at Illinois in library science. Then it was the University of Iowa where I went into the Ph.D. program for business actually, but very short. I was working full-time there at the University of Iowa Library in Business and half time in reference. But then it only lasted for six months and I was drafted into the military – in the Army during Vietnam. After two years in the military I went to St. Cloud State University as part of the faculty for four years. From there I went to get my PhD at Florida State. From there I went to the University of Evansville as dean for four years. From Evansville, it was on to Bowling Green State University – first as dean of libraries and learning and resources for six years, and six years as vice president for university relations.

(KA): And can you recall when the thought of, or the [00:34:00] reality of being involved in the philanthropic field started formally?

(DB): Formally?

(KA): Yes.

(DB): Oh, yes, definitely. It was at Bowling Green – well, I shouldn't say that. It was perhaps at Evansville actually, because we did a remodeling to the library (and, of course, it's a private school).

(KA): Okay.

(DB): And so I was engaged in fundraising with the board of the university in raising the money and doing grant requests to raise the money to build the new building. It was really there that it started in a more direct way, and then at Bowling Green. As the Dean of Library, I was very involved working with the Friends of the Library and raising money for the university library, but it was when the president [00:35:00] called me in his office one day and said, "I'd like you to be the acting Vice President for University Relations while we make a national search. Our current vice president just resigned." Well it was an offer I couldn't refuse. That turned into becoming the permanent vice president and president of the foundation at Bowling Green. Of course, that role is what really peaked my historical interest, because I was working with significant major donors and in our conversations in talking about why they were making a gift and their engagement really led me to want to know more about the tradition of





philanthropy; which led me to here in 1990 when Bob Payton called me one day and said, “Why don’t you come for an interview?” and “We [00:36:00] want to start up this program.”

(KA): So you were there right at the beginning which is interesting.

(DB): Yes, I was their first director of academic programs and research; and developed the master’s program, then the doctorate program, and then the undergrad program – working with a lot of other faculty and staff at IUPUI, of course.

(KA): Right. So tell me where’s your passion, sort of your intellectual passion, about the field life? What really still – you get excited about the ideas of, or you still find fascinating?

(DB): Oh, I still enjoy the corporate social responsibility in a big way. I enjoy the Youth in Philanthropy initiative in a big way. My engagement there... I also really [00:37:00] have a passion in my heart for the history of American philanthropy in particular, but that’s getting broader now with more global examples. In my next five years here, I’m going to focus on some of those projects that – I mean I really would like to get more involved in, and more out of the administration.

(KA): Yup, [Laughter] give you a chance to really pursue these, because you’ve got a lot to offer and it would be good to get it all written down or at least get started on some of it, right?

(DB): Yes.

(KA): Yup, good. Well, is there anything else you wanted to make sure to say? Thank you. You’ve been terrific. This is exactly what we needed and it’s been a good conversation. Any...

(DB): Well, thank you for thinking of me as a friend of Michigan, because I am. And you’ve made that possible.

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