



INTERVIEW WITH JOHN FRANK DIRKS – JANUARY 23, 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 John Frank Dirks on January 23, 2013. Conducted by Kathryn Agard, primary author and interviewer for *Our State of Generosity*. Recorded via Skype. 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): We're interviewing all of the people who've been involved over the last 40 years of the history and doing profiles of the people who've been involved and then asking the kinds of questions that I want to talk to you about today, about your recollections. I'm also writing a series of themes about lessons learned, some how-to manuals, and then some lesson plans that people who are teaching [00:03:00] in nonprofit administration could use, which would drive them, of course, to be able to use all of these original documents that we're making available. It's kind of an ambitious project that we have. But we're chatting with people and of course, you were a very important part of the launch of a lot of Michigan organizations. So that's what brought me to the conversation with you.

Frank Dirks (FD): Well, I'm honored. I was delighted to work with a lot of good people. I'm not sure how big a deal I made, but I was thinking as you were talking about that, I do have a couple of boxes of paper from the past and I'd be happy to sort through that and send some to you. If you've got everything you need, I don't want to add to your piles but...

(KA): No, we don't have very much, because yours would be Commission-related, right?

(FD): Yeah. You know, early Commission and pre-Commission.

(KA): Oh, absolutely. Historically, [00:04:00] that's really valuable to us. We can either scan it in and send it back or scan it in and keep it if you don't want it back. Either way is fine.

(FD): Okay.

[Conversation regarding past friendships and health matters between KA and FD removed]

(KA): Let's start, Frank, by telling us about your work in Michigan and sort of how did you come to Michigan? What did you do when you were here?

(FD): Well, I guess the best way to describe it is that the Kellogg Foundation was the prime [Laughter] mover for a lot of stuff. [00:08:00] I think that that's probably a good way to think about it. I went to work for Youth Service America – gosh, I guess 1990 - and it was really because of the Kellogg Foundation-funded Youth Volunteer Corps project and they wanted to get a field organizer to work with that. Like all things that Kellogg does they like to support innovation and replication around the country, but they like to have a nice emphasis on Michigan as well. Their funding of the Youth Volunteer Corps project emphasized some start-up for that project, aligned with the three Kellogg-funded youth – I forget what they call that here, kind of youth empowerment or youth concentration zones. [00:09:00] Kellogg funded this project at that time to try to support collaboration and program development for youth in Southeast Michigan and Detroit and the Upper Peninsula and in the Grand Rapids area, if I correctly recall the third one. There was going to be a natural emphasis on Michigan in that work. Youth Service America was also a prime facilitator for advocating for youth service – service-learning, to some degree but youth service more broadly. There was certainly a group of folks that worked with Youth Service of America that emphasized service-learning and National Youth Leadership Council, the higher education groups – Campus Compact [00:10:00] and the other college youth program (again, its name escapes me, but Campus Compact being the kind of institutional network).

There was a service-learning component that Youth Service America worked with, but Youth Service America was kind of a broad facilitator for youth service, youth development. Youth Service America got that grant on behalf of the Youth Volunteer Corps project. Youth Service America had a Ford Foundation grant to operate and promote general youth development opportunities; Youth Service America had worked with the William T. Grant Foundation and Sam Halpern in that regard. So YSA was this kind of policy coordinator, promoting federal legislation related to this. One of the [00:11:00] guys there was a fellow named Frank Slobig, who had got his start in the Department of Labor in the Nixon administration and was a big proponent for drawing on multiple resources, promoting collaboration and, as he liked to always say, “Build capacity through the resources that you have” – so serving as kind of a conduit between a number of different federal funding programmatic streams. Which is what good community-based youth programming is all about, trying to draw on the resources that you have and to promote



people to work together and collaborate and create opportunities for volunteer service, whether it's youth or any age.

The Youth Volunteer Corps project provided an opportunity to work in Michigan. I went to work for Youth Service America, I was kind of helping this field organizer [00:12:00] for that project. This occurred shortly after the passage of the National Community Service Act of 1990 which had supported, among other things, the state advisory councils (or organizations) that were supposed to provide a coordinating role for all youth-related service and volunteer activities in the states.

Under the '90 legislation, there wasn't a formal commission structure. The idea was to do some demonstration projects or have states to compete to get some federal support to actually institutionalize this kind of coordinating, convening role for these related programs. What we saw was an opportunity [00:13:00] by being in Michigan (with this emphasis on the Kellogg Youth Development regions that I'd mentioned supporting the work of the Youth Volunteer Corps). In alignment with those that had potentially replicated more broadly, we could actually then use the opportunity of these demonstration projects for these federal coordinating bodies or these councils or commissions or whatever you want to call them to build on a terrific array of resources in the state and get that competitive stream. Use the impetus behind the competitive funding available for these select state demonstration projects to draw people to the table. There is kind of an alignment of events that was quite fortuitous, [00:14:00] and I think that the groups that Kellogg had nurtured and cultivated up to that point were primed to step forward to this process and come together for it.

We pitched the idea to Joel as we were working the Youth Volunteer Corps angle and he saw some merit in it, but wanted to see how it might be able to work. What we were saying is that we wanted some supplemental funding to just really do the project work of getting this commission entity together, because there was a deadline (I think, at the end of '91) to submit these applications to either win or not win, if you were a state, to get funding for these entities or bodies. So Joel said, "Hey, look. You know what? [00:15:00] How do you know people are going to come together?" The other thing that was going on too, this alignment of stuff, was in November of '90, John Engler had just been elected governor and he came forward with a smaller government cost-cutting mandate. He was seen as not necessarily the best friend of folks in the traditional human service, youth development world and all that stuff. So Joel was also skeptical, "Alright, do we really know that the governor's going to be on board with this thing?"

What we said is, "Let's test it out, do a beta run with just... (although, we didn't use "beta" then. That's the term of art in the last few years but anyways.) Let's do a run with just Kellogg grantees. [00:16:00] Let's see if we can get them all together and use that as an opportunity for them to describe what they would want as a plan for coordinating service program groups and youth-related groups of the state. We can take that and then if Joel, Kellogg likes it, then that would be our case for funding the larger initiative for doing this state policy thing. In the meantime, we try to reach out to the governor and try to bring him and his folks on board with this as well." One of the things that I heard when I was just visiting Michigan for the first time was he gave a – one of the first times. I guess this was in his state address that was televised, he spoke about Hands Across Michigan. He was talking about, "We can't have government do



everything. What we need to do is build on [00:17:00] this vibrant volunteer sector we have in the state and I'm going to support it with this thing called 'Hands Across Michigan.'"

So that triggered the notion that, "Well, yeah, the new governor's folks are receptive to this." So I reached out to a woman named Stephanie Comai-Page who was – I don't think any longer "Page," she's just Stephanie Comai – who was on the governor's staff and also worked with Michelle Engler. I just tried to reach out to her to say, "Alright, there are these opportunities. You may have a concept looking for some structure, we have an idea about an array of resources that you could tap into, all of it outside of the traditional funding roles of government. This might be something appealing to you." [00:18:00] She arranged a meeting with Michelle Engler and we started to reach out to Michelle to see if we could get her engaged with this. At the same time, we did the Kellogg grantee meeting. That went off well. We had a draft outline of what they wanted to see in a more comprehensive youth policy framework. Joel was suitably impressed with that. All of this happened not just because of me, but we were tied in to you, Kathy, and the Council of Michigan Foundations because Kellogg provided the support, again concurrent, for this major expansion of community foundations in the state. So there was a natural network that they created through the Council of Michigan Foundations to do that. You were very receptive and open to it. There was also the Campus Compact [00:19:00] which Kellogg had funded and actually had housed in the Michigan State University Kellogg Center which Diane Algra ran; she also was very receptive and open to this idea.

That grantee network group, Kathy, you were a big part of that, as you know, and then Diana Algra was a big part of it. There was a good kind of critical mass of individuals who were willing to come together, and this whole idea of using this as a springboard to a broader kind of comprehensive planning thing. You all bought into that and were instrumental in making it happen. So after Joel gave the green light we got, I don't know, maybe a \$50,000.00 grant, \$30,000.00 – I don't remember any more, but some grant to do a [00:20:00] conference and some follow on to basically do at a larger scale what we'd just done with Kellogg grantees. For that we also worked to reach out to another one of the kind of infrastructure resources. I mean, all of these kind of alignment of stars in the state: George Romney who was a very inspirational leader for volunteers and in this state has been a big advocate. He liked to talk about every community, the United Way, or Community Foundation, and a volunteer center. That was his big push. He was very suspicious about the role of government and all of that stuff, understandably and rightfully so. But as the founding force behind the National Volunteer Center, now the Points of Lights Foundation, he was appropriately [00:21:00] and characteristically a little skeptical at first but willing to participate.

So the big draw for this big conference that we had in June of '91, I guess, was that George Romney was going to be there, Michelle Engler was going to be there, and Kellogg was backing it. And if we all worked together, we could get some of this competitive support from the feds through the new Commission on National Community Service, created by the '90 legislation to create a model. And so the conference came off. We put together good notes. We had some subsequent regional meetings of folks for this process and in November, we put together a final report to this entity.

In the meantime, after that June thing, [00:22:00] Michelle Engler and the governor's staff agreed to establish a commission, jumping ahead of the game without even federal funding. They provided nominal



support basically, but the first lady put her stamp on it and made it her thing. So this presentation in November was to this newly formed commission entity. It basically summarized the findings of all of these planning groups and laid out an agenda which called for, among other things – and this gets back to the Youth Volunteer Corps – using the Youth Volunteer Corps model as a model component for youth community service in communities, and working in conjunction with volunteer centers and the community foundations. It emphasized [00:23:00] the role of the Campus Compact place. It really just, I want to say “codify,” but helped institutionalize in a sense that was connected to the consciousness of the state leadership, to the governor’s office and the first lady. All of these different groups that were right around the state and provided some kind of a conceptual framework for it. It also laid out, a pretty strong agenda for encouraging further collaboration with these groups. One of the components helped launch what was called “Michigan Pairs,” which supported further development of collaborative models in communities and tried to do at the community level what the state was just doing at the state level. So that’s how it got going and then [00:24:00] Michelle continued that effort. She wound up hiring Kathy Agard to lead the commission. Oh, [laughter] forgive me. She hired Diane Algra. Sorry, sorry.

(KA): Okay.

(FD): Forgive me. So she wound up hiring Diane Algra. Kathy, you were continuing to do all of the stuff that you were doing and, always, you were thinking strategically. I would say it was one of the things that was pretty clear as well as the Kellogg infrastructure everywhere, that helped bring this together because I think just about everybody who became engaged clearly saw the positive, strategic implications of working together in collaboration. You didn’t really have to sell anybody on why it made sense to go through this exercise, [00:25:00] to try to get the federal support. You didn’t have to sell anybody beyond just the obvious. I mean, it was not a hard sell, let’s put it that way. Most everybody grasped it right away. People would ask good questions. Everybody would throw in some good ideas, good suggestions for how you might be able to leverage relationships, but the notion of collaborating, leveraging resources, finding that to open up new avenues of collaboration, that seemed to be second nature to everybody, [Laughter] which was good. Everybody knew of everybody else. I have to say, just having lived in South Carolina and traveled a lot around the country and worked with lots of different groups, I do think that there’s something unique and culturally [00:26:00] appealing about Michigan in the sense that people are very open and warm and willing to work together. Now, there’s always institutional barriers and institutional turf consciousness, but not to the degree that you can find in other places – or at least it didn’t manifest itself at this time; that’s why this is, I think, such a fortuitous thing. Anyway, that’s a long, rambling...

(KA): Oh, it’s exactly what I needed. No, thank you. You have a perspective on the history that I don’t. I came at it not from the government organizing side, I came at it from MCFYP and the community foundation side so that’s exactly what I needed, Frank. Thank you. You started to get into this a little bit, and as you reflect back on it, is there any way that you can pinpoint what the behaviors or attitudes or what was in the culture? If you were talking to one of my grad students at Grand Valley [00:27:00] about how to be successful in philanthropy leadership, what you might do, what did you see happening in Michigan or what did you hear from people? I think from my perspective, Dottie and Russ gave extraordinary leadership but I can pinpoint the fact that Russ ran meetings better than anybody I ever met.



As you think about it, what might you have learned from people that you've tried to take forward into your own career that would be helpful for other people to think about?

(FD): Well, you mentioned Dottie and Russ. I think that they clearly both had a terrific working relationship. Again, I think Russ is, [Laughter] if not the, one of the prime movers behind all of this. I think that everybody worked together. I think that everybody tried to take a 30,000-foot view and then see where other [00:28:00] people could fit in and complement that. I don't think that there was ever a reaction "Well we don't need that" or "That doesn't fit here." I think that Dottie, for instance, she would certainly look and see how what we were talking about related to community foundations and the Community Foundation Youth Project and was very supportive of that, willing to help out with that. She saw where it aligned and where it complemented and she was quite content to have folks go off and do stuff that would advance that. Obviously, Russ did that with everybody, but he would do that through Joel who was quite happy facilitating these things. He was very open to letting people take a lead and run away with stuff.

You were very good in strategic and [00:29:00] in facilitating stuff. Where there would be a connection that was not said, you would encourage that, but you didn't try to run everything yourself. I mean, Diana was just great. Why, we couldn't have done any of this stuff without Diana basically opening up her office and turning it over to what we were doing as we were coming in there. That year, in 1991, we spent a lot of time in the state. We didn't have any place. She just basically threw open the office and did that. Everybody was kind of aware of what everybody else was doing and it was all for a greater good. Now again, it's that just that alignment of individuals at that time and I don't know. I do think that if you're looking for an essay or ingredient, it has to be somebody who can take a strategic view and is able to make a [00:30:00] constructive tactical application, and put that forward. I think you have to do that, particularly in order to move stuff down the road. It's very easy for that to get seized up. At least in this time period, there was very little reluctance to do that. Now, later on, particularly related to the time I was in the Commission, there were some challenges brought from this initial network of individuals or this affiliation of individuals; but even in Michigan, you've got the institutional barriers.

(KA): Sure. Sure. So from YSA's perspective, you didn't start to work in Michigan and then work for YSA. You were actually sort of sent to Michigan from YSA. Were there big differences between the [00:31:00] experience of YSA in what you were doing in Michigan, and what someone else might have been doing in another state?

(FD): Oh yeah. With the Kellogg support, we did that commission development in Michigan. We also used the experience of Michigan to try to leverage more resources so we could work with other states and we actually did. So I spent a lot of time in addition to what I was doing in Michigan, traveling around, trying to get other states interested in it. Kansas was another state that put together, through this kind of competitive process – that was the hook. We were trying to get people to get engaged, use the allure of this federal start-up money through this competitive application process, and the relative codification of these commission entities, for lack of a better word. They didn't really have a name, they were called "commissions" only after the '93 legislation. [00:32:00]



We were trying to use that as a way to get the attention of more people. Other states did it a lot differently. Kansas worked very closely with them but it was driven out of the Department of Education there. What they put together was a pretty thorough and comprehensive plan but it definitely reflected something that looked like it was the product of a state education agency. We worked with a couple of other states as well and there were, different degrees of creativity, design, and innovation and all that stuff, but Kansas and Michigan through that process – and I have to look back through the notes or something like this and try to recall the other states. I guess Massachusetts was one of the others. They clearly led the way, [00:33:00] from different starting points, but they put together good proposals. Now, Kansas continued to basically be run through this Department of Education and in my perspective it proved stifling to the potential development of that commission entity and that initiative in the state down the road.

I think that Michigan was unique and one of the other things that made Michigan unique (and I touched on this earlier with Joel's question) was Engler on board with this. He'd just come in and he doesn't sound like he really embraces... While there was kind of that natural skepticism, there was also a fairly consistent view that everything doesn't have to be run out of government. That we may be talking about [00:34:00] funding from the feds and all, but this is all basically rooted in the philanthropic sector. We're looking for government to be a real partner but not something that drives it. I think that that was a perspective that could basically unify almost everybody there. Again, I go back to Kellogg. It wouldn't have been the case without the Kellogg Foundation doing this because Kellogg created the environment in which everybody said, "Hey, we can do this. We don't necessarily have to [Laughter] rely on government to do this. We've got old man Kellogg's money and he's doing a nice job for us." That's a big thing, and one of the biggest inhibitors for a lot of other states. We see this in our public policy now that unless there is unhesitating, [00:35:00] strong, private sector leadership that also can write a check, it's hard to get going. That gives government – either [Laughter] by design or by default – leverage over the whole process which can ultimately distort it from what it all started out to be, which is *how do we make communities a better place for kids through voluntary and philanthropic activities*.

(KA): You mentioned something that I'd like you to explore just a little bit more and that is with Kellogg, it was the money but it was also more than the money, right? Can you talk a little bit about what the role of cash is versus what the role of engagement or vice versa is? Or are they mutually exclusive? To me, it seems like Kellogg brought something that helped to develop the culture. I'd like to hear you talk a little bit about whether you think that's true or what your perspective is on [00:36:00] money as well as people power or influence or whatever.

(FD): No, I think that that's exactly right. Kellogg wasn't just somebody off – they weren't the Ford Foundation writing a check and finding out how things were going a little later on. They were engaged. Mott – was it John Blythe over there? Mott had an interest in this area too, but they were not engaged like Kellogg. Kellogg was truly invested. They were not just financially invested, they were institutionally and culturally invested in the state and what they were doing. I think of that as probably deriving from the origins of the institutional culture of the Kellogg Foundation, its commitment to Battle Creek, its – oh, it wasn't Grand Rapids, it was Battle Creek that was the other Kellogg Youth Initiative area, sorry.



[00:37:00] Their long time investment in Battle Creek, (the Kellogg Foundation is there, you know) “This is our hometown. This is where we are. We’re invested in this state,” that permeated the culture.

Russ Mawby would be personally invested in what the Kellogg Foundation was investing financially in. Joel’s an example. Joel’s test of this notion of using collaborative gatherings to build planning and then move towards the Commission. That meeting of his grantees, he was there. He was invested in it. He didn’t want to just send me a letter, “Let me know how it goes.” He was an active participant. There’s no question that Kellogg’s total involvement made a significant difference, [00:38:00] because they could talk about what was actually happening, but they also could operate at that 30,000-foot view which is typically necessary to deal with most larger institutional partners.

(KA): Great. Thanks. Perfect. I remember that meeting as us calling ourselves “Joel’s kids.” [Laughter] These were all of his grantees and it was all of his kids in one room.

(FD): Yeah, yeah. I do recall that was your line. That’s exactly right.

(KA): So tell me a little bit more about your advice to someone like yourself in working with government at that intersection between government and the philanthropic sector. Why, or why not, has Michigan been successful? What advice might you give from your experience in developing a partnership with government?

(FD): [Laughter] Well, [00:39:00] you know, I...

(KA): Would you like to run for office? [Laughter]

(FD): No, no, no, no. I have a very dark view of government. [Laughter] I think government is like a well-meaning Tony Soprano. You basically get in with them and it’s hard to ever get out again. I remember having a pretty uncomfortable [Laughter] phone conversation with George Romney trying to get him engaged in that first meeting in ’91. I’d try to say how it was different this time, [Laughter] and it wasn’t Model Cities or it wasn’t just another one of an endless stream of federal programs that were going to spawn state activities that were going to then [00:40:00] find themselves in their own little silos or niches – drawing on resources but not really accomplishing any of the bigger goals which they set out to do. I remember saying, “No, this is all really different this time.” It’s not, unless people are really committed to doing it and part of that commitment is the willingness to say, “I’m going to use government for their resources for a short period of time and then I’m going to walk away. I’m either going to do it myself or I’m not.” That’s a tough thing. It’s a tough thing because no elected official likes to say, “I’m going to stop writing a check,” because they’re afraid they’re going to tick off some constituent or constituent group.

They like to keep that tap running and it’s hard for the groups because it requires [00:41:00] a certain degree of discipline and hard-heartedness, for lack of a better word, when you’re out there motivated to save the world. *I want to help kids. I want to do this. I want to bring philanthropy. I want to get people volunteering. What I’m doing is good.* Well, it may not be efficient. It may not be cost-effective. It may



not be the best use of the public dime. All of that stuff gets tossed out the window because you're kind of caught up in what it's about. That creates a dynamic where you create institutional dependency. There's no better example in my view than if you take a look at the City Year program. City Year is a fabulous program, excellent program. It's all great. I'm not knocking City Year. I know Michael Brown and they do a nice job trying to bring in private sector dollars to support their activities but they don't [00:42:00] have a sustainable model without AmeriCorp. When I was [Laughter] in the Commission, we were trying to promote the weaning of those programs. We can't be funding the same anti-poverty programs for 25 years, there's going to be a problem. To even raise that question means you must be in support of poverty. [Laughter] Well no, I just don't want to support the same program for 25 years. Can we do something different with it?

So you have that kind of direct assault which gets a push back. Then you also get in another community in the state is what this collaborative group of not-for-profits would do. They would take institutional money that was supposed to be short-lived and they would use it to subsidize their basic operations and because they realized that [00:43:00] the funding stream had a shelf live, they would simply, every couple of years, rotate who was the lead so it would appear to any reviewer that it was a whole new thing. Well, it was not a whole new thing. It was just business as usual. If government is to be effective as a partner, it has to be a capital investor who's willing to walk away and let people do what they need to do in their own communities. If government doesn't, then government runs the show, and then people don't have to step up and take that lead. That's the dilemma and ultimately, if you multiply that billions of times, that's why you have a structural federal budget deficit of \$1.2 trillion which will be bankrupting us if we don't get control of it in a very short order.

So what do I say about [00:44:00] that intersection between government and the non-profit sector? I wouldn't take the money. In South Carolina, I was on the commission down here for a while and it is dreadfully run. A lot of it has to do with just the culture of the state here. Money was made through the ground. That's the cultural history of South Carolina. Money was made through the ground – planters, farmers, that kind of thing. You didn't really have any kind of capital formation. You didn't have people creating manufacturing firms or companies. Money was rooted in the ground, so that frames the cultural perspective. It was finite like the ground. You don't have the same level of philanthropy and you have a decentralized government, everything's run through the legislature. So there is no accountability in any real way through any kind of executive leadership for the way money is run. I wound up finally telling people down here, "Look, you would waste [00:45:00] far less time of everybody involved in this if you put all that federal money in a basket, put it on the state capitol steps, and set fire to it because we're wasting it. [Laughter] But nobody's going to do that, and nobody's going to actually try to make it better because that doesn't work with the kind of the institutional norms of government in that particular area. So don't take government money. Use government, the lure, as an incentive. Try to you know, make it a short-term thing but unless groups are willing to find their own means to keep operating, then they're going to simply be at the mercy of the caprice of government funding and they're not going to actually be able to achieve what they set out to do. Long, rambling answers. Sorry.



(KA): They're very similar to the way that foundations work actually because most of them make that same kind of up front capital investments but with the idea that they're [00:46:00] going to walk away at some point. So...

(FD): Well, and my bone to pick with foundations quite frankly is that they do that with the assumption that government is going to pick up the tab. [Laughter]

(KA): Yeah.

(FD): Well, let me tell you, at some point, everybody has to step back and say, "Alright, well, how do we keep this? How do we actually do this?" and nobody in the human service world wants to say, "Well, maybe that youth program just can't sustain itself and it has to be shut down." People don't like talking about that. You're always going to find some heart-wrenching story in the paper about how the kids have no place to go because that program could have been... You don't find the article saying, "Well, they could go across the street to the other program," or anything like that. So that is the dynamic that makes it so difficult and foundations, I don't think and that – I've been out of the game. I've been doing what I'm doing now for a while, but I don't think [00:47:00] that foundations have really confronted their – I don't know what to say – deleterious contribution to this process by being that seed funder without figuring out sustainability. Nobody's going to challenge the sustainability thing. I think that if a foundation were to devote itself to doing nothing other than underwriting mergers and acquisitions of not-for-profit organizations, they could do far more good. Maybe there is somebody out there doing that now. That's the kind of stuff, I think, that would be a better use of foundation dollars right now – really challenging groups to come together and be more efficient with what they deliver.

(KA): Yeah, every one of my grad students wants to start their own non-profit, is one thing. No one ever wants to work with another one or believe that anybody else [00:48:00] could do it as good as theirs – but then it comes out of passion. It comes out of a good place, but they all organizationally think they need their own. Actually, I do remember, the model that I've now – you know I'm getting up to an age – but the model that I had in my head, as a young professional, was that the foundations would give the seed capital and if it proves itself, it would be picked up by United Way and the government for ongoing support. And that model hasn't worked for quite a while now. So yes.

(FD): Yeah. [Laughter]

(KA): You're right, but it's the model certainly that was in place at the start of a lot of these organizations.

(FD): I really don't think that we've broken that mindset. I realize I live in a state that's really behind the curve in a lot in regards in this area. But as you talk about your students, that's great. When you hear social entrepreneurs, and we want to encourage [00:49:00] entrepreneurship among not-for-profits – that's great. I would love to see more of that but if it's starting up all kinds of new ones and then figuring out how to get that funding stream and then being savvy enough to put those articles in the paper about how the funding's cut off so people are going to be sleeping in the streets or something like that. That



doesn't help anything. It's the responsibility of those who set the norms, the large foundations, to change that dynamic a little bit. If you're out there as a software entrepreneur coming up with your new 3D manufacturing marketing scheme or something like that, and it didn't work out, well, it's just a little "so-and-so's enterprise shut down" note in the paper, but that's it. You know, it's not, "Oh my gosh, what are we going to do? Because this great touchy-feely thing [00:50:00] has shut down." That's unfortunate because our communities are not as well-served because of that impulse.

(KA): Well, yeah. I want to turn the conversation a little bit because I want to honor your time. I really do.

(FD): Yeah, well, sorry for my rambling. I should be much more succinct...

(KA): You're doing great. You're doing great. What I'd like to then use our last few minutes and let you just think back to your pre-YSA days and tell us a little bit about how you came to the work. A little bit about where did you grow up and tell us a little bit about you.

(FD): Well, I grew up in DC. I always had a public service inclination and started out as a teacher in high school and middle school history, literature, and government and [00:51:00] I continued working in the education world – civic education, primarily, concerned with citizenship and promoting more responsible citizenship. That was the thing that drove me. The thing that connected me to service was that we would do these government study programs in Washington through these not-for-profit organizations I worked with, but there was no way that kids could go home and teachers could go home and they could really then become better engaged in the community other than voting or protesting. Nothing in any significant, ongoing way, because there wasn't a framework. You get involved in political parties but political parties are not the organizing mechanisms they once were. My thing was service and I was very much influenced by [00:52:00] Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Nisbet's *History of the Idea of Progress*, and Paul Johnson's *Modern Times*. Those were the kind of things that drove my thinking. For a while, I was taken by the whole communitarian movement here, Amitai Etzioni, his thing, figuring out how to connect responsible citizenship with community service and create a kind of a conscious awareness of those two things. To some degree, I guess that 30,000-foot and that closer perspective, that's what motivated me. So that's what drew me to Youth Service America and what got me engaged with the Youth Volunteer Corps and Kellogg and that's what motivated me when I was at the Commission and... [00:53:00]

(KA): I just wonder, as a child, were your parents service-oriented? Where did that come from?

(FD): My father left when I was young so it was pretty much my mom. I liked doing stuff, but if I had to say anything and detect a theme in that, I found it remarkable both at Youth Service America and other places how [Laughter] many Catholics there were. It wasn't any kind of overt, wearing on your sleeve thing but it would come out and there is this one element of Catholicism which is a very strong service emphasis. I really did, from that perspective, see some kind of connection across people because [00:54:00] among the many people who I found inspiring, and worked with, and was motivated by, there was a selfless quality to it that was really inspirational. That's what I saw if I was a part of that stream because of my own faith, and I would think that that would be it. Otherwise, it would be just that people



need to be engaged in their government and be responsible citizens and what better way to do it than service and volunteering.

(KA): Then when you left the Commission, you headed down south, as I remember. How did you make this transition then into the corporate world?

(FD): I came down here with every intention of trying to do the same kind of things [00:55:00] that I'd done in Michigan, find that niche. South Carolina, in particular, is not the most welcoming place for folks from the North. I remember I was in a meeting here as a volunteer and raised some critical questions about something that was related to their Commission and something that led to a lot of unrest among the folks around the group. Somebody stood up for my defense said, "Well, yeah, you gotta understand he's from the North. He doesn't know how we do things down here."

(KA): You don't even have an accent yet.

(FD): I know. I know. There's just really not a well-developed not-for-profit sector. I did some stuff with the South Carolina version of Michigan Nonprofit Association in the South Carolina Association of Nonprofit Organizations, and I was on the board for that for a while but that just moved on. [00:56:00] I guess the chair of the board a year or so ago sat down and said, "You know what you were talking about five years ago, we're finally there right now." That's good, and I'm not patting myself on the back about that. It's just that I had the benefit of being in a state like Michigan so I took that perspective to a place like South Carolina and it's just not there. What I'm doing now, in terms of financial service, I'm helping individuals and not-for-profits. We do have a number of not-for-profit organizations and foundations among our clients so I feel like I'm helping them in that way and to a great degree, I feel like you make more of a difference when you help make sure somebody is able to live the way they want to in retirement. That's a real personal thing [00:57:00] and particularly in this environment, in this market world, having somebody who can give you good advice, that's important. That's tangible.

(KA): As a retiree, I second that. I think we should put on the record that you left Michigan for a girl so it was... [Laughter]

(FD): Yes. I came down to, to marry my beautiful bride and she was with the College of Charleston and so...

(KA): The best reason in the world to leave a state, that's for sure.

(FD): Indeed, indeed. I will always have a deep fondness for the people of Michigan. I say this all the time to folks, I've never met nicer or finer people than those just collectively that I've met and had the pleasure of working with in Michigan and...

(KA): You were definitely a part of the family that we missed when you were gone. So we have about a minute left and just [00:58:00] in general, when you were thinking about this interview, was there



anything you that thought that you wanted to make sure to say for the record that I might not have asked, Frank?

(FD): Wow, that's a good question. I just think that what made what happened there successful was a constellation of really impressive stars. John and Michelle Engler, they were critical. You wouldn't have had a Commission without their willingness to do that. George Romney played an inspirational role and one of my most rewarding memories is knowing that we were able to create that Romney Service Award just months before he passed away, and that we were able to do that [00:59:00] before he did. You, Diana, Joel, Dottie, Russ, there were some folks who made it happen by virtue of their openness and their willingness and all of that. I don't think that happens all that often and I think that when things come together like that, you have to grab it and charge in. To make the most of what you can with the opportunity because those players are going to change and their perspectives are going to change, and things are going to slow down and once they do, things become institutionalized and it becomes an awful lot harder to make any difference.

(KA): Great. Nice thought. Thank you very much. And hey, it's really great to reconnect with you. It's been a long time. I've often wondered where your life story took you and it's really good to be able to remake the connection. Thank you very, very much [01:00:00] for your time.

(FD): Well, thank you, Kathy.

- End of Recording -

