



INTERVIEW WITH CRAIG RUFF – SEPTEMBER 26, 2012

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 Craig Ruff on September 26, 2012. Conducted by Kathryn Agard, primary author and interviewer for *Our State of Generosity*. Recorded at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy in Grand Rapids, Michigan. 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): Let's start with what's helpful to me and also a frame for other people in your involvement. So would you review for us your engagement with the philanthropic community in Michigan, over the years and your experience and include the Council of Michigan Foundations, the Michigan Nonprofit Association, the Michigan Community Service Commission and the Johnson Center. You've been around this field for a long time, tell us about your story. How did you first get introduced, what you been involved with?

Craig Ruff (CR): My first exposure to Michigan nonprofits and foundations was probably when I was working for Governor Milliken in the 1970s. Even in that era, the foundations were trying to partner with state government on many different recreational human service issues. When I left the governor's office in the early 80s, I became active in a public policy consulting firm, Public [00:01:00] Sector Consultants and we just treasured our relationships with foundations and with nonprofit organizations, many of the trade

and professional associations in Lansing, the big healthcare systems. The relationships were warm, they were (I hope) mutually satisfying. So yes, I go back quite a ways.

I do remember Dottie Johnson so fondly. She is just a hero for all of us. This creation (the Council of Michigan Foundations), of course, was not an accident. Michigan was the place in the country for the location of major foundations. That they would come together and create kind of an overarching umbrella organization, allowed for them to [00:02:00] leverage what their gifts were against others and kind of build a bigger pile. It also was a great parking place (the Council was) for the shopping of public policy ideas. If we needed maybe in state government some kind of incentive for local communities to expand their parks, you would pick up the phone and you could call Dottie (now you'd call Rob) and say, *"Do you think anybody would have any interest in that?"* *"Oh yeah, I'll be back to you in 48 hours."* Not every question was answered positively, but every opportunity that paired up a public sector goal and a foundation goal made all the difference in the world in so many different fronts.

(KA): Did you have any experience with the Michigan Nonprofit Association and when it came into being?

(CR): [00:03:00] Yeah. There are so many trade groups in society. If you want to know how Lansing, Michigan is run, how the state government is run, just go into the Yellow Pages of the Lansing phone directory and look under "Michigan Association of" and you will see just page after page. It was inevitable that the nonprofit community would create a body that would again, leverage one group's investments with another's. But most particularly, that it have representation, this nonprofit sector which after all, represents 20 percent of the gross domestic product of Michigan, employs probably bordering on 500,000 people, more than 10 percent of our workforce, but that sector had a presence in Lansing. [00:04:00] It actively engages Governors, Senate leaders, House leaders and all the myriad of agencies and state government. Government can't do everything, and frankly the nonprofit sector can't do everything; so the idea is to kind of pair up public needs and who is best able to fill those needs and who's got the bank account that can help make it work.

(KA): The way I put it in is you've been in the catbird seat, if you will, because you have been in the middle of so much of this [00:05:00] observing the partnerships that have come both from the philanthropic sector to government, like requesting the tax credit for community foundations but also you talking about government engaging the philanthropic community leadership issues they would like to. So can you talk about how the public policy actually gets developed? If you were talking to your students at U of M about and one of them wanted to become the head of an environmental nonprofit, what are you talking with them about how they should go about the business of engaging the government?

(CR): Engaging government, like talking to a reporter, it's terrifying for a lot of people – not I – but a lot of people. So I think about what you have to do is have a mentor who gives you comfort. Government is an unwieldy beast, even state government. Here are the steps. One, what is the problem that [00:06:00] you want solved? Two, what portion of that problem can be best solved by state government? Three, get your facts in order. Don't come in there with no answers to four key questions. Four, meet with other groups who also want to attack that problem and see if you can form a coalition. Five, retail your idea directly to the governor, the governor's key staff people, perhaps an agency head, key legislators House



and Senate. Who are the chairs of the committees who are going to have to maneuver this bill through the legislative process? And then never be bashful. Never let a meeting end without that comment, “May I count on your support?”

(KA): That's good. Now did you write the text for the legislation?

(CR): No, I didn't write it per se. I was sure [00:07:00] following it and putting in my two cents worth, but no, I can't say I was a craftsman.

(KA): Can you talk a little bit about why Michigan might have an interest in giving a tax credit to community foundations? Now it has ended of course, but at the time it was a huge and very innovative piece of legislation.

(CR): One of the hardest things to get through any government is change in tax policy. It was a very uphill fight for the community foundations when they sought to get it credit in our Michigan Income Tax Law for gifts to their endowments. It was tough sledding not only because state government was in essence cutting back its revenue – which in some years is okay, but in a lot of years is not okay – but also because there were all these other competing organizations and wonderful causes who said, [00:08:00] *“Hey, if a gift to a community foundation gets a tax credit, how come a gift to me shouldn't qualify?”* If you get too many people in the mix, then legislators get scared off. First of all, they're scared off by the sheer size of the cut in revenue. Then, they're also saying *why should I play Solomon and decide a community foundation is better than a public broadcasting station?* So my hat is off to the leaders of the nonprofit sector in the state for winning a major battle. It is off the books now, but the precedent is there. I think probably in better times it will be reawakened – at least the consciousness of the politicians will be reawakened – so nothing is forever.

(KA): As you worked with the nonprofits, [00:09:00] I asked Dottie this question a few weeks ago, I've been struck by the fact that they been able to move, on public policy issues, but in a nonpartisan way. When you were giving advice to clients who were nonprofits, how did you help them skirt this partisanship that might be in their members? You know, they may have strong members of one party or the other and still be able to do public policy. As you know the nonprofits are terrified, a lot of them, about doing public policy work even though they are actually advocating in many cases for social change. They're free to do public policy work because they're afraid of the partisanship part of it. What kind of advice would you give the CEO of the nonprofit about how to work in the public arena without being partisan?

(CR): Well, a basic rule of advocacy is that you go out of your way not to make enemies. Anybody who sits in a position of [00:10:00] power is almost by definition a great listener, and that person is paid handsomely by taxpayers to sit in his or her office and hear appeals coming in. What every organization must do is to be very careful about appealing only to one political party or the other political party, to make an issue a partisan issue. There are Republican and Democratic ways of solving certain problems, but in the nonprofit sector and in the delivery of services to people, there are rarely Republican or Democratic answer to the problem. It is comfortable to go to power players in both political parties and



make an appeal to them and to definitely stay away from any belief [00:11:00] in Lansing or anyplace else that my charity happens to have a conservative bend, the liberal bend, a Republican bend, the Trotsky bent. You got to stay away from that.

One of my favorite stories (and I'm not going to name names), I was trying to build an advocacy program for a state arts organizations, arts and cultural groups. In order to get something pushed through Lansing, it was important for me to reach out to arts leaders in different communities in all parts of the state and to ask them to pick up the phone and call Senator so-and-so or Representative so-and-so. It is much better coming from a local leader than it is from a Lansing lobbyist. I was on a conference call one day, we had about five people, arts leaders and – I'll be honest it was Grand Rapids – [00:12:00] I gave them their marching orders and why it was so important that they reach out to Kent County legislators. A person on the call said, "That is unethical," and I said, "You know, I think I hold pretty strong ethics. I don't think there is anything unethical that I am asking you to do." The person said, "I am going to have to go to my board of directors." I said, "By all means, do it because members of your board are very active in the community and the odds are any one of them would know on a first name basis your State Senator or your State Representative. And feel free to ask them to help." "Oh no, that's not the reason I'm going to the board of directors. I'm going to them to report you." There is this – it transcends squeamishness, in some quarters of the nonprofit sector. It is actually a [00:13:00] frightening thing. It's a frightening thing to go into the political arena, but it is a healthy thing.

(KA): I'll ask you to wax poetically a bit, the fact that the two sectors are the places that are focused on the common good and whether in your mind when does something seem to fit into the government side of it and when does it seem to fit into the nonprofit side? I can think of some examples where this project seems like it ought to be philanthropy and this project seems like it ought to be government and yet both are focused on the same mission in society just...

(CR): I've worked in the private sector, I've worked in the public sector and I have served on probably 75 different boards of nonprofit organizations and so I think I know that sector too. Regardless of what sector you are in, [00:14:00] what's the most important thing on your plate? The most important thing is to be effective. If you are effective – whatever your mission in life is, whatever your strategies are – you can wake up the next morning and pat yourself on the back and go about doing more good that day. What we have found in this complex society is that to be effective, you often need to join with another sector. A great example would be the Detroit riverfront redevelopment. That could not have occurred without Detroit area philanthropies mustering support among their boards and mustering public support and providing very healthy chunks of money. It couldn't have been done without state government, because state government and the city of Detroit were partners [00:15:00] at the table in constructing this breathtaking redevelopment. And it couldn't have been done without the private sector – the major corporations in Southeast Michigan fueled huge investments in this development, which I believe whose price tag was more than \$300 million. I would say the Detroit River project is a great example of the sectors coming together.

You know, we kind of say *well, the nonprofit sector and the government sector, they are the ones interested in the common wealth and the common good*. Well, I would say corporations do that too. They keep an eye out in their own communities about how they can return some of the profit that they have



gleaned. I can't think of a place in Michigan more robust in terms of corporate commitment to community life than Grand Rapids. In [00:16:00] Midland, I can't picture Midland without the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation. I can't picture Flint without the Mott Foundation. And you can't picture any of those foundations without brilliant entrepreneurs who invested heavily in their own brainpower and their wallets in creating corporations of international scope.

(KA): In projects like the Detroit Riverfront project, did it matter who called the meeting? Did it matter if the leadership came from any one of the sectors or didn't it matter as long as all three were at the table?

(CR): On the Detroit Riverfront, I don't think you could single out one specific spark plug, one convener of the first, the initial meeting. I think it was probably one of those situations that evolved through many different conversations, three or four business leaders going out to lunch one day, one of them just [00:17:00] casually mentions, "*Why can't we have a really beautifully designed Riverfront?*" Or another person saying, "*They were going to build a casino on this beautiful river,*" (when, in fact, casino operators, as you well know, blacken the windows so nobody can tell whether it's daylight or nighttime, they want to keep you at the craps table). So no, there was no single spark plug.

(KA): That's true, when you think about it, they could be at the airport in terms of where it's going to end up. Did you work with Mrs. Engler's...

(CR): I did not.

(KA): Okay, I was trying to put you in time and place. You were more with the Milliken end of things in the early years?

(CR): Yeah.

(KA): Okay yeah. We're hoping to talk to Governor Milliken and Robin is on that case to see if we can at least do an audio interview with him.

(CR): Well, if I can help you let me know.

(KA): [00:18:00] On reflection, what do you think are the key leadership attributes that have made Michigan, when you look at Dottie and Russ and others and Rob and all the people that you have worked with, what do they do that has made the state, assuming that you like the way the state looks, if you don't then that's another question.

(CR): The reason Michigan is respected, not just in the United States but throughout the world, for its philanthropy is because of its leadership. Scale is one thing. It is certainly one thing that the Kellogg Foundation was I think arguably the largest foundation in the United States at one point and we have had many, many other foundations of great scale; but scale alone is not enough to change society. [00:19:00] You need leaders who can get to other leaders. You need leaders who are world-class listeners and not just pontificators. You need a leadership quality, which I'll call consensus building – somebody who is



willing to accept 10 percent of their idea as part of the total solution and not reject a solution that isn't completely compatible with where they're going. I think Dottie Johnson and Russ Mawby most particularly, but I think Ranny Riecker and Bill White (now I'm getting in trouble because of not mentioning names I should), but they are real titans; they would be titans in any field. If they were in a healthcare system, they would be the CEO or the chief surgeon. If they were in the corporate world, [00:20:00] they would be CEO or the COO. They could work anywhere and be effective. It is just all those qualities – empathy, sometimes willing to be a world-class follower in addition to being a leader.

(KA): Can you think of an example where you have seen them at work that really exemplifies some of this and your experience with any of them, with Ranny or with Bill where you have actually seen them at work and said wow, this is really good leadership that I'm watching?

(CR): Well, I can think of so many examples where Dottie and Russ and Ranny and others, I've seen them in action so it's hard to isolate one or two but I would say that if you're ever in the Midland area, you pick up the phone and you call Ranny or you call Jenee Velasquez at the foundation [00:21:00] and you say, "Could I borrow you for 45 minutes and I would like you to take me around Midland and point out the qualities that you have contributed to, be it parks, be it restoration of homes, homeless shelters, the healthcare system." And sure, I'd be in Ranny's boardroom from time to time and I would watch how diligent she and other members of the board were in flyspecking proposals and making sure they get a decent return on the investment. Everything that I've ever seen out of Ranny Riecker and that foundation has been first class.

(KA): And Midland is really quite amazing and they are so lucky. Being from Muskegon, I keep wishing we had a couple of...

(CR): Well I'm from Saginaw and Lansing doesn't have anything.

(KA): They don't have. That's exactly right. [00:22:00]

(CR): In so many different ways.

(KA): You understand completely. No one lives in Lansing, that's the problem. Everybody's going through it. When you're teaching and working with people who are either going into the governmental side of this work or the nonprofit sector side of it and when you're coaching them, what do you tell them that they need to know, or experiences, what do they need to bring to this work? How do you help them to become good professionals in this field that we have all been in?

(CR): Well, it may sound tacky, but in a graduate class that I teach at the University of Michigan in public policy, I have only two required textbooks. One of them is Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. What I try to instill in graduate [00:23:00] students is not a sense of smartness, but a sense of salesmanship. Somebody in their 20s or somebody in their 30s, probably in a cynical way, believes that the whole world revolves around the concept that 'it's not what you know, it's who you know.' What I find very comforting is 'it is not who you know that counts, it's who you get to know that



counts.’ In this world of shrinking distances between and among people, you are one, two, three degrees tops, separation from virtually anybody in the world. So I will tell my grad students one of your required tasks during the term is to scoop up 250 business or personal cards. You can get them from anywhere you want but you just can’t cheat. You can go into a restaurant with one of those big glass bowls and everybody throws in [00:24:00] their corporate card to win a free lunch. You can’t go in and scoop all those up. You have to get them from individual human beings.

I think networking is just – In my whole life, I’ve never found anything that worked better for me than expanding every week the network of people I am in touch with. Not everyone likes me, I don’t like everybody. But the very fact that a Rolodex holds 4000 or 5000 names and as you get older (maybe a few of them are passing away, few of them I have forgotten who they are), but oh my, it’s such a blessing. You can make things work that way, you know, you got a dilemma, you got a problem you want to solve. Just go through your Rolodex and say well, that person could help me on that, that person could help me on that.

(KA): You find that people generally want help?

(CR): Oh, everybody wants to help. Everybody wants to help. [00:25:00] I can say no to a car dealer. I can’t say no to a Dottie Johnson, I can’t say no to a Governor Milliken, I can’t say no to a Debbie Dingell in Detroit. These are acquaintances and friends. Friends don’t let other friends down.

(KA): I’d like you to talk a little bit more about the idea that this, well it’s a relationship and a system, it’s not necessarily a closed system, that some people would think that there isn’t any, that you’re either part of a system that has power or you are outside of the system that has power, but I think you’re suggesting to your students that it is porous, they can get into the system. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

(CR): In the modern age, the last 20 years since the Internet, we’ve kind of all become blasé about the past. We think that life was terribly [00:26:00] difficult and that all the rules got upended with the invention of the Internet. Well, it has made the world smaller, there’s no question about that, but the basic thing has always held true, you have a goal, you develop the plan and you work the plan, very basic. To the extent that in working the plan you’ve got to meet people who you don’t know, you go out of your way and meet the people you don’t know. You can’t work a plan just alone, a plan of any action. Going back to what I said earlier, the word is “effective.” Effective. In order to be effective in meeting your mission in life (be it making money, be it winning public office or being smart in philanthropic gifts), you have got to [00:27:00] bring in armies of people into your fold. You’ve got to win friends and influence people all the time. Keep your eyes on that prize.

Government at least is not as closed as a lot of people think it is. Again, you will run into your state senator or your state representative at a dry cleaners on a Saturday morning. They hold district hours. They expect people to come into their offices and ask for things and say, “Here is a real dilemma, here’s a problem in downtown Saginaw, can you help fix it?” That is part of their job description is to be open and to be good listeners. They don’t always make the choices I’d make, but I’ve never seen a politician be deaf.



(KA): So we have, as I mentioned, divided the organization of the way we'll present this [00:28:00] into four major themes, so what I will do now is talk about the themes and have you kind of reflect back to me from your experience whether you think these are true or not. So one of the things that we are going to postulate is that Michigan has an ethic of servant leadership, that that has been sort of a tone that has been set in the philanthropic community and if you agree with that, what examples might you have, or if you disagree with that, why would you disagree and what examples might you have?

(CR): I think when you talk about servant leadership in Michigan, it goes hand-in-hand with our history. We were settled in this nation, in this state by people coming from New England and they were Puritans. They had very strong ethics. They were maybe not the most humorous people in the world, but they got the job done and there was a work ethic that they instilled. [00:29:00] They also brought Yankee mentalities. What are Yankee mentalities? Gentleness, gentility, niceness, warmth. Then as obviously waves of other immigrant groups came into the state, you had the Germans introducing the concept of free public education and kindergarten and subsequent waves of immigrants. The African-Americans from the Deep South during the 19-teens and 1920s and they brought their own cultural pride, their own cultural bent to the state. When you meld all that together, what arises to the occasion are some – not a great number, but some – people who say, *“This great state that my ancestors helped build, [00:30:00] it's my job to help protect it.”* There is chauvinism in Michigan too about the fresh water. Every state is chauvinistic about something. You drive through Georgia, *“Hey, we've got great peaches.”* You come to Michigan and what are you thrilled about? The fact that we are nearly completely surrounded by one of the world's treasured masses of freshwater. So Michigan wears that with great pride. Well, when you're proud you tend to think, *“How can I pay back?”* When you're proud of how life has dealt with you and your success, you tend to peel off some of that success as a payback to the people around you who helped.

(KA): This is a little bit more about the work, so one of the things we're going to talk about is [00:31:00] the fact that what has come together with a lot of these projects has been people and money and knowledge so that you know you have people who in some of the foundations are deeply knowledgeable about their area of expertise or research that has been done and money has been used to leverage, but I think a lot of people look at Michigan's philanthropic community and say, *“Well, you've got Kellogg, you've got Kresge, you've got Mott.”* They sort of dismiss the human element of all this. So I'm wondering if you can talk about where you have seen these three or other elements come together, people power, money power, and knowledge power to make a difference in some of the projects in the state.

(CR): Boy, I'm a big believer in the wisdom of Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *The Tipping Point* and other books. Small things can make an enormous difference. [00:32:00] Little things can tip the balance. I say to people, put in your purse or put in your vest pocket a piece of paper that says, *“The right answer at the wrong time is the wrong answer, but for every right answer there is a right time.”* You've just got to seize the moment. I would say that in addition to knowledge, money and power, there is another thing I'd add to the mix and that is just world-class and great instincts. Sometimes people just don't trust their instincts, when in fact their instincts may be far more valuable than the U-Haul of reports that I've got backing me up. The best is a situation in which you have a rich life experience and you have great instincts and you trust them. In that sense you have combined the two great things. [00:33:00]



I've seen some very small amounts of money being invested in some community program by a community foundation that would equal in payback multimillion dollar grants that have been bestowed upon an organization someplace in the world or some place in the country or state. It isn't necessarily the scale of the money, it is how purposeful the philanthropist is, how sharp and keen he or she is about what the return on an investment is going to be and how, what is the odd, what are the odds that this thing is going to work? And that again is life experience and instinct. I think it's a complicated world in solving problems and you don't have to always go to the big 800 pound gorillas; in some cases might be better off getting a smaller gift [00:34:00] from a larger number people than one major gift from one player.

(KA): Thanks. And then we of course have had a huge public policy emphasis in Michigan. You've talked about, we are going to talk more in our writing about the fact that particularly MNA and the Michigan Community Service Commission have been involved in public policy. Have you been observing the Office of Foundation Liaison enough that you could talk about it or is it not an area that you know about?

(CR): I'm no expert either on Karen or the office, but I do know how she operates. I do know.

(KA): Would you share little bit from your experience with Governor Milliken about what kinds of conversations happened when the governor or your office or in this case now Karen formally engages the foundation people? Did you go out [00:35:00] and seek a relationship with Russ and with Bill White and with Ranny? Did they seek you out? How did, that connection, how does that happen?

(CR): I'm such a firm believer in the wisdom of networking and so when you first encounter a person, sometimes you don't even remember. I remember first meeting Ranny Riecker in the late 1960s, early 70s in Ann Arbor and we stayed in touch for 40 years. In terms of how the governor would manage the list of projects and requests from philanthropy for help is through [00:36:00] an office that he has and an individual that he has and Governor Granholm before Governor Snyder who would take all these competing requests for money from state agencies for help and would try to organize them and have the governor set priorities among them so that when she picks up the phone and calls up Rob Collier and says the governor has got two things he'd really like some help on, it's not hundred things. It's two things. And that they are manageable sums of money, that the governor is not asking for \$5 billion. The governor may be asking for \$50,000 to staff a state mental health task force. But you have an organized central spot in state government for managing both the priorities of an administration and then the request [00:37:00] being made of Michigan philanthropy.

(KA): Is there a similar connection between business and the governor's office?

(CR): There is no similar connection with business, although we must be honest with ourselves. Corporations have foundations and so to the extent that the administration, the governor's administration, whoever the governor is, might need some money to help on a task force or cause that it may be just as likely that a corporate foundation, General Motors Foundation, DTE Foundation and so forth, would be as likely to be a participant at the table as either a family foundation or private foundation.



(KA): Do you have a favorite story or two about working with Michigan philanthropy that you would like to get in the record for posterity?

(CR): Well, I do have one. I was just thinking of this on [00:38:00] the drive here. In the early 1990s, I had just moved into the board chair of a group called Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan, the advocacy group for arts and culture. Within a week, Marilyn Wheaton, who was the founding Executive Director, the only Executive Director, called me and said the mayor elect Dennis Archer wanted her to join his administration. I am devastated, I am weeks into this gig. I can't replace the founder, there is nobody like Marilyn Wheaton. So I give it about 20 minutes thought and I called the chairs of four other statewide arts organizations and I said, *"I don't know who you are, [00:39:00] I frankly don't know what you do, but empathize with me, sympathize with me. What would you do?"* What my real purpose was to try to build a relationship to a point where they would have enough trust in each other that we could actually meld them together into one organization. It took me two years (who knows how many hours, the negotiations were just mind numbing), but we merged four of the five and created an organization called Arts Serve Michigan, which in the end, picked up the fifth group that I was hoping to merge. That taught me so many lessons.

It taught me in a frustrating way, that nonprofits could take richer, fuller advantage of private sector [00:40:00] success. In the private sector if you have company A and company B and you've got the CEOs or the board chairs, sniffing around each other trying to figure out, should we actually buyout this other Corporation, meld together? It's all about the bottom line. If we put these two organizations together, could we increase the profit of the new organization, beyond the individual organizations? But in the nonprofit sector isn't about money, it's about mission, it's about the person who is heading the organization, "Oh, we can't sacrifice Sally or alter of mergers with other groups." Frankly it is about money. It is philanthropic money, but if you can (through efficiencies, through affiliations, [00:41:00] federations or outright mergers) stretch the amount of money you have, you're going to serve more people in better ways.

The second one I learned from that is that nonprofit leaders sometimes view themselves as community volunteers and that is okay. But a community volunteer is different than a person who feels a sense of fiduciary responsibility, who has a sense of, "How can I improve the balance sheet at the end of the year for my organization?" Who has business savvy. Not every board has that kind of quality of its directorships. I think a lot of nonprofits that I could name really need to stretch the vision of who they should be recruiting onto their boards. Really hardheaded [00:42:00] business types.

(KA): Okay now I'm going to change tone and I would like you to tell us your philanthropic biography. What I mean by that is just, you know, you have been a giver your whole life as well as being involved on the sidelines in all of this but also in it, you've been in the game. Where did that come from? Your sense of public service, were your parents involved? So tell us your story.

(CR): My personal story is not probably any vastly different than other people's, but I was born and raised in Saginaw. My father was a railroad conductor. My father dropped out of school in the eighth grade because, in the Depression, he felt guilty about eating at home, figuring that his two sisters and his mom and dad couldn't really afford another meal for him. My mother [00:43:00] did graduate from high



school and did work as a nurse's receptionist, but when I came along, Mom, as was so true in the post-World War II era, Mom said, "I'm not going to go to work. I am going to stay home and raise the kid." There was very little in the way of philanthropy in our family. One was just a function of money. My father didn't make enough money to be really generous.

There was always a sense, however, of strong religion, religious faith and if there were to be any charitable checks written, it was on Sunday mornings dropped in that little bowl. When I came to Lansing in 1972 to work for Governor Milliken, it changed my life. I can't imagine anyone in the world luckier than I to have as a first boss [00:44:00] a gentleman statesman, brilliant leader, kindhearted, tolerant, empathetic, sympathetic. You would have to go into Roget's Thesaurus to find enough good words to say about Bill Milliken. He was the one who basically taught me the life lesson that: giving is a heck of a lot better than taking; being generous with your time, being generous with money; helping people who aren't as advantaged as you are – helping them become self-reliant (not just stay on the dole if you will, for years and years and years); exciting people to think outside the box and to grab opportunities that might otherwise be closed off to them. Bill Milliken was the person who taught me philanthropy.

(KA): Had you wanted to go into government?

(CR): I had kind of a crazy, early liking of politics. [00:45:00] I can remember, I can actually remember the Stevenson-Eisenhower campaign of 1956. How old was I? Seven. That's how young I started getting it in my blood and it will probably never leave my blood at this point. I love politics. I like public policy now more and how government works and government processes. I like that inside...

(KA): When did you get into the governor's office?

(CR): Well, it's a quirky thing. How I got to meet Governor Milliken, how I got to be lucky enough to actually join the staff was again through, not who you know, who you get to know. I was a volunteer on U of M's campus for the Washington County Republican Party. I said to the County chair one day, her name was Nancy Chase, I said, "Is there any candidate out here, any Republican candidate who I could help in their personal campaign?" She said, "There is. We have [00:46:00] this fine legislator who's got a new district. His name is Ray Smith. If you'd like, I'll pick up the phone and call Ray and see if he could use another volunteer." He did, I did, we had a successful campaign, got elected. About a year later I discover that I am supposed to take a summer internship, during my masters program at U of M in public policy and that I have to have some kind of a government-related job for the summer instead of going, as I had always planned to do, back to the railroad and make a fortune and pay off my school responsibilities. So I call Ray Smith and I said, "Could you kind of snoop around Lansing and see if by any chance there would be an internship, maybe even with little pay for some job?" [00:47:00] He calls me back within an hour and said, "How would you like to work for Governor Milliken?" I said, "Whoa." I came up the next day for an interview, was hired on the spot and again it is just one of those serendipitous moments but again it's all a function of how many people you can reach out to, get to know, bond with.

(KA): So you would've been in your 20s?



(CR): Yeah, I was 23.

(KA): Do you have a family?

(CR): Yes.

(KA): When you think about what you like to transition to them about what you've learned, what kinds of things, what are the lessons that you would like to pass on?

(CR): Well, one lesson I've already passed on to our 26-year-old daughter, who lives in New York – actually two things. Number one is a love of culture in all its different forms, not just the fine arts and not just arts in general, but just culture – the way people behave, the [00:48:00] things they create. That stuck. That is in her gene pool now. The other thing is to always be attentive to your friends' needs. As your friends expand, their needs are going to expand and there's going to be demands on you. Don't ever view that as a burden. View that as a great opportunity to help a friend in need. I think that will extend in her life to her being very charitable in her volunteer activities. She'll never get rich, but to the extent that she can be somewhat generous in giving to causes, that will be it.

(KA): Give up what she has. It's really fun to watch them grow up, isn't it?

(CR): It's magnificent. What I have advised friends who were just about to start a family now, the sons and daughters of friends, is that every day gets better with a kid, every single day, from the minute that they are born, you can see 24-hour progress if you're attentive. I said that will extend to the teen years. You don't have to make the teens a brutal family bloodbath. [00:50:00] Erica got better, 13, 14, 15, 16, and frankly, come on. If you're a parent and you can't outthink a 13-year-old, there is something wrong with you.

(KA): That's exactly right. You need to get with the program. On your drive over, was there anything else that you wanted to have put away on videotape for future researchers, young people who are thinking about public policy work or thinking about a career in philanthropy, that you would like to make sure is here that I haven't asked you about. Is there any other lesson or a thought that you'd like to share?

(CR): Michigan has always been an entrepreneurial state until we got fat and sassy with the wealth of the auto manufacturing sector. I think we let down our guard in the 1940s and 50s. We were happy [00:51:00] without a high school diploma. You could still afford a cottage in the Northland. You can afford a new car every two or three years and I think we got, I think Michigan got, has been in a rut now, unfortunately, of about two generations where we have, we've forgotten fabulous entrepreneurs left us these legacies not just within philanthropy, but within the auto sector and cereal-making and furniture-making and we need to regain Michigan as a spot where entrepreneurs can thrive.

What I said to the grad students is you have got probably just as much luck getting capitalization [00:52:00] from a bank from a family member, from friends to start up your own company than you have of landing a job that somebody else has written a job description for. So you sit back one of these days



and you write your perfect job description for yourself, how many hours you want to work, how many days a week, what do you want to do with your time, what do you want as a product? And let me help you find the capital to do that. You don't have to work for somebody else, you can work for yourself. I think that we need to rebuild that sense of entrepreneurialism badly, because we just inherited a fabulous situation that now we've seen drift away. The manufacturing sector is certainly in decline with very little prospect of it bouncing back to where it was. We've just got to find young and old talent who are willing to roll up their sleeves, start their own firms [00:53:00] and start their own philanthropies, start their own charities.

(KA): Great. You are fabulous.

(CR): I doubt that sincerely.

