



## INTERVIEW WITH MARIAM NOLAND – NOVEMBER 21, 2011

*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 Mariam Noland on November 21, 2011. 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):** You were in Cleveland and you were in Minnesota before you came to Michigan. Can you tell me a little bit about your impression of Michigan before you got here, if you can remember what that was like? Your understanding of how things work, or the scene, in Michigan?

**Mariam Noland (MN):** Well first during my time in Ohio it was clear that Michigan, particularly CMF (Council of Michigan Foundations), was the leader in the country. Ohio did not have a comparable, or, didn't even have any organization of the foundations and corporate givers. When I was at Cleveland I was the education policy fellow and the only site was in Lansing so I used to trundle up to Lansing all the time and helped start the very fledgling – whatever the Ohio grant-makers is now called.

So the impression of Michigan was that it was the leader. Then at one point – I can't tell you the year, you'll have to look it up – Dottie invited me to speak at one of the CMF meetings. I can visualize the hotel. So very favorable, leader of the pack, and strong individuals and strong leadership around CMF.

(KA): Great thanks. In looking at your resume, I didn't know if you had any roles with MNA (Michigan Nonprofit Association) or the Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC). Have you been engaged with them?

(MN): No. Nothing significant.

(KA): Okay, because we are going to be looking at all four of the institutions on CMF, MNA, the Commission (MCSC), and the Johnson Center, so I just wanted to make sure I picked up a thread if you had been more engaged with them. I know you have had your head down building a \$600 million foundation [referring to the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan].

(MN): It has been CMF, COF, and now on the board of Independent Sector...

(KA): I will circle around to those maybe. That is good. Thanks. Can you tell me the story of the community foundation, the development of the community foundation [Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan]? John Marshall... You should know we talked with John and he was very complimentary of bringing you to Detroit. Can you talk about it, and in particular, any ways having an association like CMF might've helped or hurt? And also how, again, the kind of tenor in Michigan might have made a difference?

(MN): Well it is unusual that there wasn't a strong community foundation in Detroit, this being I think the last major metropolitan area without one; whereas the first community foundation was started in Cleveland in 1914 (so, across the lake). It is a very different history of giving to endowments in Southeast Michigan than in Minnesota, or Ohio, for sure. I think the development can be credited back to strong leadership of a couple people. They include John Marshall, they include Dottie Johnson, Joe Hudson, Gil Hudson, and probably a couple others.



The story of CMF's role in development is that Joe Hudson began a conversation here and it took him about seven years. He reached out to other community foundations – Homer Wadsworth who was then at Cleveland, and so forth. But the first white paper on what it would take to develop this community foundation was done by Dottie, and John Marshall was, I think, probably a careful editor of it. So absent CMF, absent the role of John in having Kresge put up the first challenge grant, there is a real question of whether the community foundation would have gotten underway. It was actually tacked onto the business plan for what was then United Foundation, now the United Way. So there were a lot of compromises going on, but it took some strong hands of a couple people to make it work. I could go for at least two hours on this, but that is cutting to the chase.

(KA): Good. One of the things that John had talked about – and you mentioned here, too – and maybe you could comment a little bit more about it in kind of the 'lessons learned' vein, is the longevity of the gestation of good ideas and kind of the process of how, I mean, people have just sort of stuck with it. I am wondering if you could chat a little bit about that. Seven years, that is a long time for it to develop.

(MN): It is hard to start a new organization in a way that it is going to have a good chance of being something substantial. Joe took his time in working with leadership here so that in the end he could get the right words put together and then it got sort of this kick start from John who was a true believer and was able to say, "Okay, here is money of scale." I understand that the first ask of Kresge was smaller than John actually came back and offered up.

We actually did a 25th anniversary video – which is probably still on our website – where there is a funny line where we asked people, "Why are you involved in the community foundation?" And they all said, "Joe Hudson called." It is really a story of persistence, strength of individuals involved.

Dottie kept trying to keep it honest. I think she was saying it needed to be independent; to get it going it really took this compromise of being tacked onto the United Way – which when I interviewed for the job I said, "Only if it is separate." They knew it needed to separate, they just didn't quite know how to do it.

(KA): The quality of leadership is something that we have trying to get our arms around, and the nature of the people who have been in leadership positions, the kind of tone that they have set. As you are walking through some of these other specifics, if you have examples or stories, that would be really helpful. I have been reading CMF's history; I do believe, Mariam, that you were



involved in every single initiative that was there. It's been great. I thought I would start with the Energy Initiative. Can you tell us a little bit about how that developed and what impact it might have had? Did it make any difference at all, was it important?

(MN): Let me just go back and address your question about leadership. What it took to get this community foundation to be successful was the strength of the board leadership. They had access to capital; they knew what it was to be a sophisticated board and to really deal with the big questions, the policy questions on the assumption that they had staff that were going to make it happen. Furthermore, they were willing to take the risk and put the operating support up on the premise that we were going to develop. But in terms of what it took to make it happen as well – again coming back to CMF – we had to teach this board what a community foundation was. So a deep down planning process – led by Ted Mackey, whose name you may not know. Really, we were able to bring in the right people – including people from CMF – but other people around the country to say, “Here is what a community foundation is, here is what a fully-functioning complex organization it needs to be.” So it's education, it's board strength, and it's leadership – and then putting up the resources to make it happen.

Going to the Energy Initiative, the Energy Initiative happened because, quite frankly, also in the formation in the early years of the community foundation I had help from around the country. Lorie Slutsky was [at] the New York Community Trust; they were way ahead of the pack in working to get energy dollars into New York and into their foundation. She loaned me a consultant, who then we hooked up with CMF and with Dottie; Joel Stromberg was his name. If you ask Dottie about Joel she would probably remember him, he drove us both crazy. But he had the contacts in Washington, and in New York, and then spent enough time in Lansing to help us make the right contacts. There were a number of people in Lansing that helped make that happen (the Director of the Public Service Commission at that time, and so forth), but it really took Dottie, and quite frankly, me, running around Lansing late at night trying to twist arms. Dottie was the arm twister and I was just tagging along saying *here is how it could work*.

CMF stepped forward and said – I think probably for the first time – “We are going to take money on behalf of the field, on behalf of the community foundations. We will figure out how to get it to them, and we will figure out how to help them spend it well; and then convincing the legislature to make the monies available.” I think it helped: A) solidify how CMF helps community foundations, B) got community foundations to work together, and C) hiring Jane Morgan to run around the whole state supporting community foundations. As you may recall Kathy, she was half the time here and half the time for CMF; [she] helped teach a lot of the smaller community foundations what it was to do this kind of work. So it was enormously important for us, it was our first major



outside dollars, and secondly, it positioned CMF, in my judgment, to be of great benefit to community foundations.

(KA): What were the qualities that made you trust CMF to work on behalf of all of its members?

(MN): Dottie. Would you like me to say more?

(SHW): What if there hadn't been Dottie? Or what if Dottie had resigned partway through, for whatever tragedy, would these initiatives have continued? Or was it so dependent on one person?

(MN): Well, the Energy Initiative was dependent upon Dottie because she had the Lansing contacts. I was brand new, I didn't have a clue; I didn't know about East versus West, all those little things. So it was Dottie who really had the trust and the power to make it happen in Lansing, and happen for CMF, because it was a new way of doing business. Once it was in place, it would have continued; but making it happen and setting the pattern for CMF was really her leadership. I mean, I could probably strain my brain here, but I don't even know who else was on the board of CMF at that time. Also, I would say Gil Hudson was very supportive of all this, and he probably was on the board; he was supportive of us. He didn't know anything about energy initiatives but he figured, *let's help community foundations*.

(KA): The next big one was the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP). When Dottie first introduced it to me, she introduced a vision of community foundations becoming partners with private foundations – probably a lesson learned from the Energy Initiative – but that they could serve as kind of this delivery system partnership at the local level. But you know, you and I have lots of history with the Community Foundations' Youth Project. I wasn't there when it started, so maybe if you could start with what happened before the money came in and a little bit about the impact as you go forward.

(MN): You do know more than I know about this, but I think you're right. Part of what CMF was all about in the early days when I first was involved was bringing all foundations, all types, all leaders together on an equal playing field. Yes, community foundations are weird in that they do raise money, but I always felt that everybody was working on behalf of philanthropy for the state; so that when Dottie turned to Kellogg it was a natural, in some senses. It was a new kind of way to behave, I suppose, for Kellogg; but I do recall it was different from the Energy Initiative, which was really sort of a deal cut and everybody came along. The community foundations were asked to come with their board chairs, or at least a representative of their board, to a meeting somewhere. It must have been in Battle Creek, I don't know where, and we sat together for a day. It was a big room. Were you there, Kathy, at that point?



(KA): Depending on when it happened in the history I might have been. I remember a meeting like that.

(MN): I think it was the first time that the signal was really clear, you know, *we can do better together*, and got the board members engaged in that. Really, it builds a bigger whole... Maybe I can say it that way... Not hole in the ground, but whole together, wholeness. You had trustees there, sitting and thinking, "*Hmm, there are community foundations around this state, and hmm, there is a foundation that wants to help us.*" So I think the model – and the model is different for each of these projects, but it set the model that we can work together, which helped the FIMS (Foundation Information Management System) Project, it helped the Tax Credit, all of these; and then the notion that we needed an R & D function, which led to the PR for Give Forever. These things just naturally grew over time, and the piece behind most of this eventually was Kellogg. Mott was in there, but Kellogg... Mott was in there in a different way, and it was national. Kellogg always felt more Michigan.

(KA): One of the things that has stuck me as I read this, and I probably sort of knew it but it wasn't quite as obvious to me, was the role that peer pressure and setting the bar high has had on expectations for community foundations for themselves, can you talk a little bit about that? You just mentioned it in terms of everyone sitting in a room and trustees seeing one another, tell me a little more about how that works.

(MN): I agree the bar is always set high. The fact that we wanted to plan the Energy Initiative – Which was a messy thing, but we knew it would make a difference, and it really did make a difference. Then hiring decent staff to really go around the state and try to help everybody – and the same with the youth project, hiring staff that would really set the bar high, make it of quality, keep pushing for quality. That just was a natural, I think it came out of the fact that CMF was the best, so everybody was going to be the best. You also had individuals who were setting the bar high. The other thing that happened – and it was a positive thing – is that community foundations in Michigan were competing against each other (or with each other, however you want to say it) so that each one wanted be better, and that is a healthy thing.

I think about moving into the FIMS Project... I can remember Paul Dimond. I called Paul and I said, "Who is the best person in Michigan to help us figure out how to deal with even contracting issues and getting good consultants in?" FIMS was really put together because of Michigan and it became national. So setting the bar high has just been a natural.



(KA): Talking about FIMS, one of the things that was interesting – and you were a real leader in this and so was Jack Hopkins, in terms of setting your own priorities. You had already started a direction and were willing to set that aside in order to strengthen the field. Tell me a little bit about that.

(MN): Well, that is an interesting point because I think to this day, people have the personal agendas and interests of their own organizations. But there is a realization, and I think it is still very true, that if you want to get things done (like a Tax Credit in Michigan), you got to work together. Jack was really a great leader of that to this day... well until he retired, I will put it that way. I don't even think we thought much about that, it just happened, it's a reality. Going multistate and national was sort of a different thing, but within Michigan we always worked together. That model was probably partially the result of CMF always trying to push the "whole greater than the individual interests."

(KA): Let's talk a little bit about the tax credit. Let's start with how we got it. What happened in Michigan that got us the tax credit?

(MN): I always go back to who had the vision, who was pushing it, and it was Dottie, it was Jack, it was the rest of us coming, trying to do whatever we could. But the notion of wanting to find a way to incent keeping money in Michigan was one of my key drivers, because as individuals retire and have the resources, they move. They go to the sun. Our competition is the sun, and if we can hook people through the tax credit and also incent smaller gifts, then we are going to make a difference for the state and make a difference for our community. It comes back to the fact we had a vehicle like CMF to work on behalf of all of us. I keep repeating myself, don't I?

(KA): No, this is all good. You are doing great. What is the quality that is the heart of our project? We have been trying to figure out what set a tone in the state that has made it possible for these organizations, even these four big infrastructure organizations that we are looking at, [to] work really well together. There is something here. It's in the water.

(MN): I mean it was the culture. It was just... When I arrived here in 1985, it was the way business was done. I don't know how it got to that point, but it probably was the way CMF was founded.

(KA): Yep, could be. Susan, go ahead.

**Susan Harrison Wolffis (SHW):** I was just going to say, and that's why I asked in a not very diplomatic way, but what if something had happened to Dottie. If so much revolved around her talents and skills as a state leader, would we still be who we are without that?





(MN): I think that you see that, well first off, she was there for a long time, but secondly CMF is different now. So leadership, both board and staff, makes a difference.

(KA): Can you talk a little bit about your observations on the relationship between Dottie's leadership, and Russ' leadership, and their synergy?

(MN): That is a good question. Well, they were compatible. Russ certainly had a vision of the collective whole and the strength of working together on behalf of philanthropy. I can sort of hear his voice talking like that all the time. Maybe this still happens, but Russ and Dottie would trundle the CMF board around a lot and we would have to go speak here... I mean, I put more miles on my car back then, but it was taking CMF on the road all the time, which was an important component of building this greater whole. Russ was always there, Dottie was there, you could name the others that were always troopers and always there. What else can I say? Russ and Dottie worked together well.

(KA): Now the next three are ones that I am not as familiar with because they happened after I left CMF. I did some early work on the Great Lakes Protection Fund piece when Joyce was interested, I think, but it didn't get funded until after I had left. Did you guys participate in that?

(MN): No, I can't help you with that.

[Transitions to discussing the Community Foundation PR strategy, "For good, forever."]

(KA): What stimulated that?

(MN): Well the National COF (Council on Foundations) had at least two, if not three, efforts of trying to do a marketing campaign for community foundations, none of them successful. So then the thought was, can Michigan do it? The effort is a valiant one and "For good, forever" has taken more than anything else, and it still has a life. I think it was, *okay, if it's not going to be done nationally, can we do it in Michigan, or do it multistate?* It was one of those, *okay, we did FIMS so now let's do the "For good, forever."* It took a lot of money again; Kellogg and I think a few others were there in funding it.

(KA): Has it made a difference?

(MN): I don't know. Ask some others. We don't use the tag line, so I don't know.





(KA): Did you ever use it?

(MN): No.

(SHW): Is there a reason why?

(MN): We did take up connecting those who care with causes that matter. We already had the name... Part of it was putting 'community foundation' in your name, so I would give great huge credit to places like Kalamazoo and others that did change their name. In that respect it was, I think, a huge success. So the PR (public relations) piece for me was not so much "For good, forever," although I know that tagline became used by many. It was all the other pieces of it that were useful; and some of it was picked up, and some of it we didn't.

(KA): And you had the freedom to be able to do that, which is a good thing.

(MN): We had scale, and money, and staff, and all that stuff. Standards is really important because again, CMF was there first in the sense that we knew that we needed standards in Michigan. We also needed standards nationally; but if Michigan hadn't been there early on, I am not sure the national would have come along as quickly – and a lot of the Michigan stuff is what is in the standards. As you know, Michigan was one of the cooperating... CMF was one of the cooperating review panels early on.

If you want to look at philanthropy across the country and, what I think is going to happen over time... If we didn't have community foundation standards – and as you know, none of the rest, privates, others, don't have standards – I think we would be in a different place right now than we are. I do think that there are risks still. For example, the definition of community foundations which has been used for the tax credit certification goes away December 31, and you remember how important that was, not having 10,000 of these. Unless Rob can get that (and I'll tell you there has been more e-mail traffic between Rob, and the Attorney General's office, and Duane Tarnacki, just 24/7 it seems). But anyhow, they need to get that fixed by year-end and... The national definition really flows from all of that that happened here in Michigan as well. Standards is important for definition and I am thrilled that it is being done nationally.

(KA): What strikes me with both the Tax Credit and with FIMS, is that a support system within the foundation actually helped to develop a framework for the organizations. So FIMS was really a way of standardizing accounting by coming in and saying, here is a computer system that will help you do it and if we all had common systems we would have comparable data. So we had the argument to be made about why people might want to go through the pain of changing their



accounting systems, but in the meantime help the field. The same thing is true of the Tax Credit. The carrot of the Tax Credit gave the whole field a framework to be able to define in fact what a community foundation was, because I remember very well trying to read the IRS code and it was far from clear until that happened. Do you want to talk a little bit about how... the standardization of systems maybe?

(MN): I agree with you that all of these projects, including the Tax Credit State Certification, being able to (most of us) use FIMS and the standards all together helped clarify the definition so that we could track common practices, common data. I will quickly say though that I think that is likely to fall apart as we all go to separate computers systems. The technology is taking us there, so I hope we can continue to be able to gather common data. It is going to take something like CMF continuing to push that – and COF, to make that happen – because I just watch us now all morphing to different bits and pieces of systems. But it needs to happen that way; I am not saying that we could go back and try to do another common system, it is just not going to happen.

(KA): Sort of the nature of what is happening in the world right now, everyone is getting the info they want and need but then it makes it hard to find a common... So you've been Chairman of the Board of CMF and I assume you think it's been effective, but I'd like you to talk a little bit about the kind of whys, what do you think makes this organization work? If you were called by the Brazilians, and they had a few foundations in their country, what would you tell them about building an effective CMF type of organization?

(MN): There are two pieces of CMF that I think are the most persuasive to others. One is that you do bring your philanthropy together as sort of equal partners in what they do. While the form may vary... And as you know, the diversity of types of philanthropic organizations is just proliferating, sort of these near-foundation type boards. There is a whole... Again, as the world changes, having a place where the common interests come together is very persuasive to me. The second, is that if you're in a country like the U.S. where philanthropy is organized, is viewed by the policy and legislators as a field, we need to continue to work on the policies that are governing us in a collective way. CMF does that for our state and then they can connect to the national.

So if you are in a place like Brazil, or wherever, you are going to need a common body that can work on the policy and legislative matters in a collective way. That is how CMF started. I think that part of its mission is more needed than ever today and is a rallying cry to keep us together, and bring us together. You need a sort of common focus, I don't want to call it an enemy, but a place to keep reminding us you can't make it alone here, and you are going to have to work together on behalf of the greater good.



(KA): What do you think have been the challenges? You've put lots of energy and time into this. And what are the successes that you think, *gosh, this is really quite wonderful?* Let's start with the challenges.

(MN): The challenges are always to keep common interest seen as important when the individual challenges are pretty strong. I think the challenge is to keep the sector as a whole in Michigan working together, and making sure that you have the strongest leaders engaged in your organizations, and that you continue to educate our legislators. So I think the challenges are sort of external, as well as somewhat internal. One of the challenges for CMF is probably having enough resources to do its job well. So the challenges are leadership, common vision, and then being effective.

So what are some of the real successes? If I want to talk just about community foundations we have just gone through four, or five, or six of the ways we have worked together that are in my view, almost all of them, huge successes. I am less able to speak about how the privates, or the corporates would think about the success, but philanthropy as a whole in Michigan continues to be strong. We need to continue to promote the importance of it, and so I am not ready to claim that everybody values us as much as I would like, although CMF has done a heck of a good job in trying to get us there.

I think a challenge currently is to get the corporate sector reengaged in philanthropy in a very strong way. Maybe that is more in Southeast Michigan than elsewhere because of what the autos have gone through, but I don't see a huge growth in the corporate sector in terms of their engagement and their giving. But that may just be my position of where I sit here.

(KA): Is it engagement in giving? What about their community leadership role? Are corporations stepping up to that as well?

(MN): They are not able to in Southeast Michigan because of their own challenges, I guess. And the fact that whereas the banks used to be a major influence, they are no longer local, so their giving and their leadership is great reduced. I could have said something else, but I would say greatly reduced. So there is a huge challenge for philanthropy at large to continue to engage all of the sectors in leadership and in giving.

(KA): As you reflect on this whole body of work, has it made any difference, do you think, to kids, and people, and the environment, and what we're all about?



(MN): I think the fact that CMF and MNA have seemed to work together is a positive. I don't know the other sectors that well, but the cross-fertilization is important. Has it made a difference? Absolutely. I keep going back to CMF because I just don't know the others as well. I would have to get some polling data, but I think there is a belief that the nonprofit sector is important in Michigan, that philanthropy is important, even though people, they don't really understand it. If we didn't have an organization like CMF to continue to remind all of us it's important to give and put away resources permanently, we wouldn't be as well off. Think about the individuals that are helped through the youth project, I can go back and tell you stories. I can tell you the Ebony Rucker story, that wouldn't have happened without the youth project. Kathy, I don't know if you've heard that story?

One of the early... We were trying to recruit people on one of the early committees and we reached out to the Urban League. They brought us a very young person by the name of Ebony Rucker who lived with, I want to say her grandmother, I would have to double check that. This is a person that Dave Campbell spent a lot of time with because we had to go pick her up, bring her to the meetings. In fact she went to one of the first youth gatherings, summer gatherings, and I think David had to stop and buy her, her first bathing suit. So Ebony was this young woman who lived with her grandmother. Her mother was, I think, in jail and had never really experienced anything like she was going to experience in working on the youth committee. I remember one evening we took the whole group out to Cranbrook, and it was a beautiful, very snowy evening and on our youth committee was, the adult was Barbara VanDusen, and Barbara was very active in what they called "Upward Bound," which was to get low-income, basically Detroit-based kids into summer programs, and then ultimately into Cranbrook. Ebony was just aggressive enough that she kept asking, "What was this place, what was this place?" So Barbara VanDusen got her into the Upward Bound program.

She ultimately became a student at Cranbrook, and I'll tell you, if you ever saw Ebony, she is the least likely person that you would think that would ever happen to. So she went through there, and I knew she got into college, and then I lost her. Many years later I was on the visiting committee of the Wayne State Medical School and I am sitting in a meeting, and I hear this voice and I think, "I know this voice." Well, the student representative on this committee was Ebony Rucker who had gotten into medical school, and I think today is actually a physician. Her life would not have ended up that way without the youth project, and I am sure there are thousands of stories like that now that we collect around the state; that you know it made a difference in that individual's life.

Now, can I say the same about the Energy Initiative or other things? It is a little harder, but this is real people, real stories, real lives that are changed.



(KA): Great, good, thank you.

(MN): We have a photo of her. We could track her down if that becomes useful.

(KA): We have been wanting to interview some of the folks that the projects have had an impact on. We may very well ask you for that. Anything I haven't asked you, Mariam, that you would like to make sure is saved for the history, or that I think about that ought to go into the record?

(MN): Well, I think the story for me is always the story of the individual leaders. There are many, many, examples that relate to the success of CMF that I haven't mentioned, but it is a lot of people who have given a lot of time to help make these organizations successful, and to make the projects successful. So I credit... The strength of philanthropy in Michigan is really the story of many individuals that give not only their money, but have given their time, and that is Ranny, and many others I haven't mentioned.

(KA): I am going to turn you over to Susan.

(SHW): Thank you, Mariam. I am going to start this out by saying we have a little bit of time to talk and I would just ask that we might be able to get back to you and I might be able to give you a follow-up call for more information later. Just for you to know, I am a retired newspaper reporter, retired early because of the economy so this is a wonderful chance to do what I really love the best, which is getting to know about people and telling their story. I get to do the personal side to ask you, why philanthropy? I have your bio and I can read about you on your website, but it always is best to hear it in your own voice. [inaudible]

You started with a wonderful economy and now you are in one of the biggest places of struggle, I would think. Maybe we could talk also about how that has affected you as a leader and your own life. I will just maybe let you get started telling me a little bit of your story about how you ended up in the world of philanthropy.

(MN): I come from a family of scientists. I am either one of the black sheep, or one of the whatevers, but I didn't know anything about foundations until I went to graduate school and my advisor was actually doing some research on the Pittsburgh Foundation. I ended up helping out on that and learning a bit about foundations. Then, as I referenced earlier, was actually an education policy fellow at the Cleveland Foundation and in that setting began to learn about the power of community foundations, the power for change, and was just attracted to that. My parents were always very active and they sort of took in people, adopted people one way, or the



other. So I suppose there is part me that really wants to do good, and help people, and found that community foundations was an interesting way to do that.

So I ended up, after I finished the internship at the community foundation (Cleveland Community Foundation) spending a number of years there doing basically work in the education field. I ended up in Minnesota at the St. Paul Foundation after getting married to Jim; as Kathy knows, that was a major turning point in my life. He is a little bit crazy but, I said “We’ll get married, and I’ll move anywhere warm.” So we moved to Minnesota, and the St. Paul Foundation was a very different beast from the Cleveland Foundation. Cleveland had tons of money; it was old we did lots of interesting grant-making. St. Paul was actually in trouble with the IRS, hadn’t met its public support test, and so I had learned what it was to raise money. I went from a huge foundation, to one of modest size, and then was enticed to come to Detroit where we had no money; so I have a backwards career in that respect.

I would say to you, growing a community foundation with no money is by far more fun than having lots of money to give away, because you are very much in touch with your customers. You know when you are succeeding or not because you grow, or you don’t. So the challenge has been, “How do we make it different? How do we do it quickly with no money?” That for me is an energizing kind of thing to do because you have to connect with real people and make sure that you are doing something they value. Therefore, hopefully, making a difference, and therefore, you grow and get to do more fun things. So for me it is the challenge, it is the being able to connect with people with resources, as well as people who have no resources every day. And the fact that almost all of our... Well, not quite true, maybe all but ten of our donors are very much alive, so we are on the phone all the time with real people that we hope are happy – and also with people that if we screw up, they let us know that we made a mistake.

What is my personal story? My personal story is I love to make deals, I love to make things happen. I love to work with people who care, and I worry each day about how we are going to do more.

(SHW): You have had some really challenging years. I am sorry I talked over you Mariam. Would you just repeat a little bit about what you just said, and then I will... What I was saying to you is, you have had some really economically challenging years. That must have really put a difference in how you do business.

(MN): My sense of timing is always a little off because when the foundation was started in 1985, we went through some really tough years then. Then we had some nice easy years and now we are back in the tough years. Part of the challenge is how do you keep these kinds of



organizations going no matter what the economy is? How do you play the fact that you have the bad economy to generate even more interest in giving?

The other thing it does, if you think about it right, is that it builds the case for permanence; it builds the case for permanent endowment, and that is the core what community foundations are. In these really tough years way back, and now again, organizations that had endowments tend to invade them and spend them down, whereas the base rock of the community foundation is you don't spend down those endowments. Endowments are permanent, you got to stick with it and you have got to have people understand why having some of this permanent money is so good during these very difficult years, so it is playing into our hand in a sense.

Now it is a whole lot harder to raise dollars, no question about it, but what we have to keep saying is, even for the organizations that are now going out of business, we can use the power of modification on those restricted dollars to make sure they stay in the community helping the next equivalent organization. So you use, Kathy can help you understand, but you use the variance power in a positive way and again demonstrate that the permanence is so important. So yes, I can sit around and say, "Oh, it is really hard to raise money. Times are awful." Or I can say, "Hey, this is really making the case for a community foundation," and that is what we choose to do.

At the same time we work real hard to try to raise money. I mean in the good years, what was the highest year... we raised over \$1 million one year and we will probably raise \$25 million this year – which is not good, and our assets are down. We peaked at \$670 and we will probably come in at \$550 this year or something like that for a couple of reasons. One is while we are in the top quartile in investment performance, it is terrible in my view and secondly, we are pumping out \$50 million dollars a year because times are tough. We could have ratcheted it back and made fewer grants, we are doing just the opposite. So you got to watch that. And we are raising less, so part of what we can look back at in the next ten years or so is, what do community foundations do in tough years, and did they really prove their metal? I hope we say that.

(SHW): Where do you learn that kind of thing? Where do you go for information, and history, and advice on that kind of situation?

(MN): I am fortunate to have one of the world's best boards. I have had three fantastic chairs. Allan Gilmour, who is chair now is a finance guy, but also a visionary and I can bounce things off of him. I talk to him every week, so I learn from my board and my leadership. I also learn from my fellow community foundations, large and small. The large ones have all gone through it. We are one of the few yet to cut staff. Have we replaced all of our staff? No, but everybody has got these





tough times and community foundations are great at sharing information with each other. I learn from peers, and from my board, and you read, and you take the risks, and you hope you don't make too many mistakes.

(KA): Mariam, it is interesting that your job is one of those jobs that nobody is ever prepared for. Can you talk a little bit about sort of what you think in your own background helped you be prepared for a job that is so amorphous?

(MN): I don't know the answer to that one. I think in this job you have to have a certain personality. First, we are all tied by [inaudible], just look across the country. We all work 24/7, we grind it out in that sense. I think you have to sort of, you have to have the thrill of the deal so there is some personal characteristics and you're right, nobody sort of studies to do this job, but it is the same sort of characteristic that you look at in other successful CEOs. You take risks, hopefully calculated, but you can't sit back, and if you don't want to live on the edge, you are in the wrong job. These are not typical foundation jobs. A private foundation CEO would probably, the one person who has done both of these is Sterling. This is a fundraising job, it is a marketing job, it is a make-a-deal job; it is not a sit back, and be thoughtful, and plan, and figure out what you are going to do next. You just sort of run and do it, at least that is how I have done it. But having a great board who I can turn to; we are right now launching a huge marketing campaign on behalf of all charities to get the tax credit, and we are able to do that because two board members stepped up and gave us the money. Not everybody has that kind of board.

(SHW): What has kept you in the nonprofit world instead of the corporate or the for profit world?

(MN): Being crazy. You could make a ton of money somewhere else. You could make a ton of money running a large private foundation, but it would be boring. I've stayed here because there was always the next thing that had to be done.

(SHW): That is wonderful and in a place that really needs it, that is the best part.

(MN): And it doesn't get easier. Controlling time is a problem for me. I am putting more time in now than I ever have and it should be the opposite, but size does not make it easier.

(KA): And the complexity of the issues you deal with. Can you talk a little bit about what it is like for you on the grant making side, trying to fix poverty, and health care, and education, and all those biggees?



(MN): We don't have the money to fix anything, so we have had to be opportunistic. Two-thirds of the money we give away every year is something we've raised. The New Economy Initiative, you are going to go raise \$100 million dollars and work on fixing the economy. I would have said they are crazy, but when Allan Gilmour came in and Paul Dimond, also a board member said, *"it is the economy stupid, charity can't fix all this stuff, what we need is a growing economy."* So, okay, we will go raise a little money, and then maybe we will raise more, and then why not \$100 million dollars? It took us 18 months but we did it, we raised the money. Now thanks to Dave Egner, he is making some sense of this.

I think ultimately the ten foundations that came together on this (New Economy Initiative) will have made a difference in Southeast Michigan. We won't have fixed the economy, but we will have made a difference. For the second year, the largest business plan competition in the world was just held here (really, enormously exciting). These businesses now, they have to be placed in Michigan and their fund, they're kids thinking things to do, and there are others ... you know. Having \$1 million dollars in prizes to incent these businesses to come would not have happened absent NEI (New Economy Initiative) is just one example. How did I get off on that?

(SHW): That is real important.

(KA): The complexity of the issues you deal with, and sort of having a mind for that complexity.

(MN): Well we figured a few... What we have to do is pick our spots. The fact that we were able to have Tom Woiwode come in here and spend 12 years changing the culture and making sure some of the... None of those public dollars were coming into Southeast Michigan to do bike trails and greenways, and Tom... I figured out how to, thanks to Kresge and others, put a little bit of private money out there and he (Tom Woiwode) came up with the idea. We are going to make a little difference in a few selected areas' building endowments. We have had challenge opportunities for nonprofits for 18, or so, of the 25 years we have been here. There are now 170 organizations building endowments with us and many others building it separately, that wouldn't have done it absent us just plugging away. You have to stick with it, and community foundations can stick with it. That's me, I just take on these few little issues and we just plug away with the good people doing the work. I don't do the work.

(SHW): I am thinking that might not be true.

(MN): My work is sort of conceptualizing it and trying to get the dollars, and then somebody else has to grind it out and make it happen. I just plug away. Seriously, that is the way it works.



(SHW): What kind of advice do you have for our next generation of philanthropic leaders both as board members, and trustees, and then professionals? Do you have anything to pass on?

(MN): Well, it is a different world. Philanthropy is much more a business (whether it's private or community), so it is going to take leaders that actually do know what they are doing and have the skill to do it. I think one of our main challenges will be to be able to recruit board members with the interest and skill willing to do this kind of leadership work. My view is that the disclosure requirements now put on board members, at least in terms of what we have to put on the tax return, will turn away some people that would be great in serving on nonprofit boards. So I am concerned about our ability to recruit the right board members; they are going to have to have a skill set that is different than was needed 25 years ago.

At the same time, the issues are more complex – or at least seem to be more complex – and I don't think any of us feel that we can work in the same way with the public sector, particularly on the national level. It is dysfunctional, you can't make deals easily. I will not comment at all on working with political figures in Detroit, that has been an interesting whole other story. It used to be that philanthropy could work very effectively with the public sector, and I think that is getting more difficult. Therefore, it makes it more interesting for me, but I think you have got to have leaders who are willing to take on those challenges. That probably wasn't your question.

(SHW): One of the things that we hope this to be, is a lesson, not only looking back at history, but also looking forward for the next group who will be doing this very important work. One of the things that you had mentioned when you talked with Kathy, is that you don't think the public at large understands the work of community foundations. I wanted to have a chance to ask you, what is it that the public doesn't understand, and what do we need to know about how important community foundations are in this time and in this date?

(MN): The reason why I say the general public doesn't even know we exist, they may know United Way exists, but they don't know how United Way is functioning today. At least there was an outreach into many corporations that touch people about giving. The Tax Credit did not really do that in that very few people use the Tax Credit, albeit though it was a way to do the broad-based outreach.

Is it important for the general public to know about community foundations? Most people won't give. That's okay, but if we get more proposed regulations, or if the federal level on deductions is a reality that will hurt giving, and so the general public needs to know the difference we are making so they can value us in a way that we will be able to incent and enhance giving. What is happening nationally is just the opposite.



So if I were running CMF or COF, I would take it as an opportunity to play the threat and engage in a very broad-based campaign. For me, I would say it is a huge opportunity to spread the word about the value of philanthropy, rather than hunkering down and feeling sorry if we get regulated. There is a need for much broader understanding of the difference we can make.

(SHW): I know this is a little repetitious of what Kathy talked about, but the lessons, the positive lessons learned, but is there anything that hasn't worked in all these infrastructures and all these coming together that you would like to talk about? Some of the collaborations, or some of the statewide initiatives? I don't necessarily mean specific programs if you don't want to get into that, but something that hasn't worked?

(MN): If you take all of these organizations and you look at what is now... I know that the times are tough, but I think there is potential that all of the outreach lobbying efforts are not effective in promoting and making it more advantageous for people to share their wealth. Then I think we could conclude that we have not been as effective as we needed to be. Time will tell. CMF was organized basically to do lobbying; educating, lobbying, but that is what brought it together and if that is the core of what we are supposed to be doing both statewide and nationally through Independent Sector, or CMF, or COF, or you name it. If we can't do that, we have got a problem. You may not think that is a fair analysis...

(KA): I agree 100%. A part of what hasn't worked to me would be the fact that you had, that there had been a lot of challenges, that it wasn't easy work. I mean any of these could have fallen apart 100 times, so whatever made it be able to work is amazing, actually.

(MN): Right, yes. Good people with good common interests on behalf of the greater good is what keeps it together. It does help every now and again if you have to rally around the threat, whatever it is.

(SHW): Sometimes a little adversity is good, isn't it, because it does rally people on all different kinds of fronts? Is there anything more about your own personal story, your own entry into the work of philanthropy, who you were as a child, to who you are now, any kind of insight you would like to share on a personal level?

[Telephone connection lost]

