

Conversations in Community Change

Voices from the Field



Edited by
Max O. Stephenson Jr.
and Cathy Grimes

The Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance launched an experiment in 2011 called the Community Voices initiative. Community Voices was a student-led group devoted to bringing graduate students and faculty from diverse backgrounds into thoughtful dialogue with leaders who have devoted their professional lives to spurring or assisting with community change. This book is the product of those conversations.

Conversations in Community Change features 12 interviews conducted by members of Community Voices, since renamed the Community Change Collaborative (CCC). The interviewees are leaders who have worked in many different contexts across the public, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors to instigate meaningful change (democratic social, political and economic) in their communities. The animating idea behind these interviews is that those in search of peaceful democratic social change, especially amidst ongoing economic and social dislocation, have much to learn from one another within the United States and internationally, and at all levels of governance.

Among the topics and initiatives discussed in the book:

- Efforts to secure civil and human rights for groups that have historically experienced discrimination,
- How food system pioneers are seeking to make alternatives to the present corporate-dominated food production framework real for growers and consumers alike,
- How the arts can open up new public and private spaces to permit reconsideration of otherwise dominant assumptions and thinking,
- The social exigencies created by capitalism's constant economic dislocation and roiling,

Ultimately, readers will come away from the book with a fuller appreciation for the complexities of democratic change—and the need for modesty, patience, and perseverance among those who would seek to lead or encourage such efforts.

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Conversations in Community Change

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Building Walls and Dissolving Borders: The Challenges of Alterity, Community and Securitizing Space. Editor with Laura Zanotti. Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishers, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-4094-3835-9. Available in hardcover, paperback and e-book formats, 218 pp.

Peacebuilding through Community-Based NGOs: Paradoxes and Possibilities. With Laura Zanotti. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-156549-426-8. Available in hardcover and paperback formats, 128 pp.

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in association with


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Dedication

*For Jessica
Whose Joy and Wonder Provided
An Enduring Example to All
Who Encountered Her
MOS*

*For Christy Johnson, Ted Grimes, and Meaghan Simonich,
And for Sierra, Elizabeth, Russell, Aiden and Macrina
CG*

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Acknowledgments

As we note within, this book is the product of more than a decade of thoughtful conversations with individuals who have devoted their professional lives to spurring or assisting with community change efforts across a disparate array of subject areas. We are indebted to all of those who gave so freely of their time to the Community Change Collaborative (CCC) at Virginia Tech. Without their generosity of spirit and engagement in their vital work and in this enterprise, this volume would not have been possible. We cannot name them all here, but suffice it to say, we cannot thank them sufficiently for their willingness to share their experiences and insights.

We also wish to thank the dozens of graduate students from multiple academic programs at Virginia Tech whose intellectual curiosity has sustained the Collaborative from its inception. Those students have selected interviewees, found time in their busy schedules to participate in planning sessions, to attend talks and roundtables and to interview the individuals (and many others besides) who appear in these pages. Their passion and acumen are on full display in this book, as they have been from the start of the CCC learning experiment. This volume, like the broader initiative from which it has evolved, is the product of their drive and imagination and we thank them. Collectively, they offer an example of the highest possibilities of higher education.

We wish to thank Dr. Lyusyena Kirakosyan for her willingness to offer a Foreword for this work and for her assistance, too, in helping us design this book and bring it to fruition. Max Stephenson wishes to thank Catherine Grimes for the countless hours she spent ensuring the accuracy of the texts of these interviews, for her unflinching good will and for her superb editorial sense. Cathy Grimes wishes to thank Max Stephenson for his insights, his deep regard for voice and clarity and his unending patience as we edited the transcripts of these interviews.

Finally, we owe deep thanks to Andy Morikawa, long time Senior Fellow at the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance and an accomplished nonprofit organization professional, who has long engaged in, and thoughtfully pondered the dynamics of community change. Andy has been

involved with the CCC initiative throughout its existence and has unselfishly shared his time and talents with students and faculty during those years. More particularly, he has alone ensured the excellent audio archive of the interviews in this series by dint of his outstanding audio engineering capabilities. This book could never have been conceived, let alone realized, without his contributions. Finally, we wish to note that we have edited each interview for length and clarity. We have sought to do so without changing our interviewees' voices or in any way compromising the intent of their observations.

MOS and CG

November 18, 2020

Blacksburg, Virginia

Foreword

At the beginning of my doctoral program some 10 years ago, I became involved in two initiatives led by university faculty, graduate students and community leaders, first in the Global Dialogue project and later in Community Voices (CV). The present Community Change Collaborative (CCC) grew out of those efforts, as Andrew (Andy) Morikawa recounts in his interview in this volume. This initiative grew and evolved as Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance Director Max Stephenson, Andy and other faculty and community members worked with several cohorts of graduate students to bring it to life.

In 2011, an interdisciplinary group of graduate students and the faculty noted above began the Community Voices initiative to host events featuring leaders seeking to encourage change in the public, nonprofit and for-profit sectors at the community scale. The CV group organized luncheon roundtables, class visits and public talks, and took turns conducting radio (now Podcast) interviews with visiting guests for Andy's WUVT FM Talk at the Table program. Each of these events provided different settings for students to interact, to learn and to undertake intellectually and personally absorbing discussions that addressed the experiences and ideas each of our guests shared. Community Voices also provided fantastic research, mentoring and service opportunities for participating students, later recognized by the Virginia Tech Graduate School for its excellence, which awarded each of its participants a Citizen Scholar Award for community engagement for our involvement in the initiative.

On reflection, much of the personal growth and development I experienced during my doctoral program occurred within the auspices of CV. The road to completing a Ph.D. can be lonely and isolating, especially for an international student. The Community Voices group proved to be the support net I was fortunate to have, not only to stay on track with my dissertation writing, but also to encounter fresh ideas outside my own research, to meet new people and to make new friends. This emotional and intellectual connection contributed to my general well-being and periodically helped me renew my excitement about my own inquiry.

The experiences of those with whom I interacted personally during CV programs carried me on many thought-provoking and often deeply personal journeys. Meeting and interviewing Pam McMichael in late 2012, for example, who at the time served as the Executive Director of the Highlander Center, was one of the most meaningful experiences of my four-year engagement in Community Voices. A few months after her visit to Virginia Tech, Pam invited CV members to visit the Highlander Center in Tennessee during a homecoming event that took place near the 50th anniversary celebration of the Washington March for Jobs and Freedom. It is difficult to put into words the sense of deep connection and belonging I experienced at Highlander, sitting in a circle of rocking chairs, being part of group discussions and workshops and learning from those who had played vital roles in making some of the United States' most significant Civil Rights milestones possible.

I had another personally powerful encounter with Joanna Sherman and Michael McGuigan of Bond Street Theatre, whom we interviewed during their CV visit in late 2013 (their interview will appear in a future volume). Not only did Joanna and Michael's candor and joy captivate our audiences in Blacksburg, but Max Stephenson and I have since co-authored research articles featuring their creative peace-building artistic work around the world.

This book brings together the edited transcripts of 12 audio-recorded interviews that members of this student-led group have conducted during the past seven years with community change leaders who worked in many different contexts. During our annual CV (CCC) retreats in May, at the end of each academic year, we discussed different ideas and strategies to disseminate the vast archive of material we were creating through academic and non-academic publications, conference presentations, reports, workshops and interview podcasts. The series' collective track record to date includes numerous journal articles and book chapters, master's theses and doctoral dissertations, dozens of commentaries and podcast and radio interviews and, of course, this volume.

I hope that this book provides readers with a sense of the thoughtful and reflective discussions that members of the CCC and its predecessor initiatives have enjoyed as those individuals have sought to explore fundamental questions concerning democratic social, political and economic change on the individual, community, national and global levels with our

interviewees and one another. The program's guests offered, and continue to afford, participating graduate students, faculty members and local residents meaningful opportunities to reflect on different ways of knowing in and through their practice. Additionally, our guests have exemplified distinct forms of leadership and collaboration and have demonstrated and sometimes embodied alternate ways to catalyze civic agency, efficacy and social innovation to challenge dominant social imaginaries. Although the approaches, methods and strategies these leaders articulate in these pages are grounded in their individual civic and professional cultures, collectively they offer all of us fresh ways of living together as communities.

Lyusyena Kirakosyan

October, 2020

Sao Paulo, Brazil

Introduction

Grappling with the Vicissitudes of Community Change

MAX O. STEPHENSON JR.

The Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance began a teaching and learning experiment more than a decade ago that sought to provide an opportunity for interested graduate students, irrespective of their disciplinary background, to explore the many factors that can influence individual and community capacity to adapt to change successfully. Students have hailed from graduate programs in agriculture, planning, governance and globalization, history, politics, rhetoric, communications and civil and environmental engineering, among others. The initiative began with the title “Global Dialogue,” morphed into “Community Voices” and, as it has grown and matured, is now known as the “Community Change Collaborative” (CCC).

Irrespective of its name, the Institute’s community development inquiry has always been guided by several key aspirations. Those relate to analytic scale of interest, research-led understanding, graduate student centrality, and praxis as pedagogical focus and aspiration. I treat each of these concerns briefly in this introduction, then turn to a discussion of three central themes that emerge from the interviews with community change professionals conducted by CCC graduate students that appear in this volume. Those ideas include the imperative and animating power of imagination, the criticality of story or narrative to individual and community self-understanding, and the abiding significance of human agency to democratic change and possibility. The attentive reader will encounter the themes I here highlight and doubtless many more. I invite readers to discover their own possibilities.

The Character and Educational Aims of the Community Change Collaborative

Institute leaders have always aimed to create a conversation with professionals working for community development in multiple policy domains and at all geographic scales. We believe that those seeking to chart

intentional change amidst ongoing economic and social dislocation have much to learn from one another within the United States and internationally at all levels of governance. We recognize that this orientation, while well-known and practiced in comparative politics and in cultural geography, for example, is less frequently undertaken in community development, although the major academic journals surely treat these concerns as they appear in other nations. We have always sought to learn from the experience of other countries as their populations have grappled with ongoing economic and social change and are convinced that doing so can be illuminating, when differences in cultures are taken into account. That is, we can learn from other nations' experience and they can learn from ours as well. Accordingly, CCC organizers have consistently sought to practice this orientation in our dialogue as well as in our selection of guests to present public lectures and to interview for the organization's podcast series.

In addition, the students leading and participating in CCC have always sought not only to learn from professional practice and experience, but also to be informed by relevant academic scholarship. As it happens, community change-related research is as interdisciplinary as the graduate student group it has informed, arising from community development, sociology, political science, anthropology, philosophy, agriculture, geography and history, among other fields. The animating idea of CCC has been to engage in rigorous and searching conversations concerning what can be learned from present and emerging conceptions of community development and to investigate those alongside the insights of grassroots civic professionals, so as to attain an informed and working interdisciplinary praxis of the factors and conditions that conduce to peaceful democratic social change. Accordingly, the initiative has, throughout its history, sought to introduce interested students to the power and possibility of critical and analogical reasoning by which scholarly arguments and insights may be used to make sense of community conditions and potentials, and vice versa. We have recognized as we have sought to do so that such efforts are too rare in professional and academic practice alike. Nonetheless, our efforts to press this perspective have been amply rewarded, as we have continued to deepen our individual and collective understanding of democratic change dynamics and have enjoyed immeasurably rich opportunities to contemplate those hypotheses and insights in the light of the conditions and reflections offered by our lecture and interview series guests.

A third characteristic of CCC is its effort to provide opportunities for participants' personal and intellectual growth. The graduate students who engage in the Collaborative are not compensated to do so. They participate on their own time and as their interests and volition dictate. What they are provided when they elect to engage are consistent occasions to make choices concerning what issues they believe are most central to their interests, to identify and explore concerns they are passionate about and to do so with individuals actively engaged in seeking to make a difference in the world. Students manage the collaborative, arrange its events, choose the bulk of its readings and otherwise chart their own exploratory paths. CCC members often note that they appreciate these opportunities and they uniformly contend they have grown personally and intellectually from the experience of addressing them.

Finally, CCC's faculty leaders have sought to provide a stable space and possibility for participating students to engage in praxis. That is, the initiative has sought to ensure that those involved have ample possibilities to situate their exploration in the broader ongoing academic dialogue concerning community development, social and democratic theory and international development. This weekly aspect of the Collaborative provides a common language on which students can continue to build insights and against which they may evaluate the empirical experiences visitors share in lectures and interviews and that they encounter in field work as well. Praxis of this sort is much harder to do than imagine, for it requires openness, curiosity, a grasp of key grounding conceptual constructs and the analytical wherewithal to employ those adroitly to make sense of evolving community tableaux. Nonetheless, this sport is most definitely worth the proverbial candle, and despite the challenge of ensuring all students across multiple disciplines are equipped so to engage, it remains an ongoing and central aspiration of the Collaborative.

Third, CCC members have had the opportunity to work with elected officials, civil society and business representatives in several communities in Central Appalachia as their populations have sought to address the calamitous consequences that have befallen them with the swift decline of the coal industry and the onset of the opioid epidemic. These projects have allowed participating students to consider first-hand whether and in what ways the theories they have explored can help to make sense of the conditions they

find. These experiences have also provided opportunities for students to hone their communications capacities and self-understanding. That growth is invaluable, apart from the intellectual capacities and wherewithal CCC can engender among its participants.

Three Central Questions or Elements that Reappear in the Interviews in this Book

As I note above, these interviews will offer the careful reader insights into alternate dimensions of community character and of democratic change within them. Substantively, readers will learn much here about efforts to secure civil and human rights for groups that have historically experienced discrimination, ponder how food system pioneers are seeking to make alternatives to the present corporate-dominated food production framework real for growers and consumers alike, explore how the arts can open up new public and private spaces to permit reconsideration of otherwise dominant assumptions and cognitive frames, reflect on the social exigencies created by capitalism's constant economic dislocation and roiling, and consider, too, how certain shared perspectives can affect human and social outcomes on a huge scale. And these foci do not exhaust the topics addressed in these interviews as interviewees, would-be architects of change, share their work and ponder their successes and failures.

We have organized the interviews into two broad groups, with the first sampling change efforts in multiple policy domains and the second focusing more particularly on food systems as an exemplar of the many mediating factors at play in efforts to conceive and realize change of any stripe in communities. Grappling with those variables and their implications for human capacity to envision alternate possibilities and to plot a shared course to seek their realization is the essence of community change work. Indeed, it is also the beginning of scholarly understanding of such possibilities. As might be surmised from the character and complexity of human communities, efforts to encourage their denizens to change their ways of knowing within them can be fraught, conflict-laden and more or less completely unpredictable.

The Significance of Imagination

Perhaps the first common attribute that appears across the interviews is the critical significance of imagination to any prospect for community change. When you stop and think of it, it is virtually impossible to engage in anything of which we cannot first conceive. The philosopher Stephen Asma has called this essential reality “improvisational imagination,” and has suggested that:

Human culture itself is impossible without the imagination, and yet we know very little about it. Why does a story evoke a whole world inside us? How are we able to rehearse a skill or an event in the mind’s eye? How does creativity go beyond experience to make something altogether new? ... We live in a world that is only partly happening. We also live in co-present simultaneous worlds made up of ‘almosts’ or ‘what ifs’ or ‘maybes’ (2017, 2-3).

This is to say that the relationship between improvisation and imagination is charged with ambiguity, but that space must be negotiated somehow and across scales if substantial civic change is to occur.

Writing of lyric poetry and its power to engage, challenge and potentially change readers in profound ways, the distinguished poet Gregory Orr has considered how human beings seek to create order in their otherwise existential disordered realities. Orr has contended that human beings confront an odd reality when all is said and done:

Behind us, the Vanished Past; before us, the Unknowable Next. And within us? Does anybody’s consciousness resemble a well-ordered room—all the furniture neatly arranged, and in the dresser the socks and shirts and blouses precisely folded and the contents of our closets color-coded also? If you were to pause right now, close your eyes, and listen to your mind for sixty successive seconds, you would undoubtedly encounter a ceaseless jumble of emotions and ideas and thoughts and body sensations and memory images and a voice jabbering away like a twenty-four-hour-a-day-radio station (2002, 15).

The poet also argued that humans do not abide disorder willingly, even as they encounter it each day:

And this unbearableness of disorder brings us to a second awareness: that each of us needs a sense of order, a sense that some patterns or enduring principles are at work in our lives. Though the tolerance for disorder varies from individual to individual, no one can live in a world of complete randomness. ... To be human is to have a deep craving for order (Orr, 2002, 16).

Importantly, and as Asma and Orr have emphasized, individuals exercise their imagination to make sense of the world they encounter. As they cross the thresholds of the entries to their homes with their known boundaries and move into the unpredictably chaotic world beyond, people rely on richly imagined stories to help them make sense of what they encounter. But they cannot do so unless they first acknowledge the disorder they confront. As Orr put the point: “It is the initial act of surrendering to disorder that permits the ordering powers of the imagination to assert themselves” (2002, 47). The ready analogy with which many readers are likely to be familiar occurs when teenagers or college students first begin to assemble a worldview distinct from that of their parents. That turn, a break really, can be extremely difficult, but it must occur if those young people are to begin to act autonomously and to continue to grow as unique individuals as their lives unfold.

Similarly, an individual or a community cannot seek to create a new order of their reality until they can first envision a different possibility and imagine, too, that it could reasonably come to fruition and afford potentials at least arguably equivalent to that ordering heuristic or frame through which they now view the world. All would-be community change agents must operate in this liminal space and no change will occur unless and until individuals and collectives can in turn first accept the disorder they now confront. Those interviewed for this volume frequently allude to this abiding reality of their work. That is, imagination is essential to human possibility, but may not alone secure that prospect.

I cannot leave this brief discussion of the role of imagination in opening space for individual and collective change without remarking that political officeholders and economic elites alike are keen actors in these processes. Elected officials, for example, may vigorously press to sustain prevailing community imaginaries, believing that doing so will earn or maintain political power, as is now occurring in the American context. They may, and do, adopt

this stance, even when change may be vital to the survival of the populations to which they strive to appeal. Corporate actors, currently deeply advantaged by existing ideational frames and organization, may also intervene to seek to maintain the dominant ways of knowing in a community even when, or if, a change away from those imaginaries may be in the best interests of the resident population. Such a situation is now unfolding in Central Appalachia. Put plainly, not only do would-be community change agents have to address the prevailing fears and to understand the dominant ways of knowing in the communities they would serve, they must often do so while specific interests are pressing hard to prevent residents from seeing a need to embrace disorder to begin to build new ways of imagining their communities.

The Power of Story

A second theme across these interviews is the importance of narrative in human and community experience. As Orr noted, individuals devise stories to make order of the cacophony they might otherwise confront. They also do so, as the ancient Greeks and Romans demonstrated, to develop a sense of their place in the world and to deepen their understanding of the vagaries of their own capacities and frailties. Narratives may reenforce or legitimate dominant ways of knowing and sensemaking in communities and, as such, may become relatively intractable to change. That inertia protects, even as it may be a key impediment to change in individual and community beliefs in the face of shifting exogenous circumstances. Populations encountering swiftly moving economic or social currents may find themselves somewhat at sea and unable to shift their idea of their community and their identities within it quickly enough to survive. Indeed, there is no guarantee that even the best-intentioned development professional can successfully help a population develop a new way of understanding itself, as the power to do so ultimately inheres in the citizens who must adopt a fresh shared story and ideal of community. This point seems to hold across scalar aggregations, for example, within policy domains and across increasingly encompassing combinations of population as well.

The Centrality of Democratic Agency

A third theme across these interviews is the central question of human or democratic agency, meaning the capacity of free individuals to make decisions for themselves and as instruments of their collective sovereignty on behalf of the polity they rule. But, as I have argued, communities in democratic capitalist political economies are sites of constant change. Some of those may well be beyond the province of local residents to control. What they can do is react and seek to create conditions that will enable continued political, economic and social life in their communities. But their visions of who they are can well be an impediment to that possibility, and while difficult to change in any case, as I have emphasized, specific economic and social interests may also work to prevent any epistemic change across a population.

I stress democratic agency and change here because those constructs in principle recognize the dignity and standing of all citizens and residents, irrespective of their religion, race, ethnicity, national origin or any other characteristic. Selecting democratic possibility as lodestone also reminds those who would wish to work in community that that frame of governance demands that all affected by change be given opportunities to voice their views—positive, negative or ambivalent—concerning possible steps their populations might choose to address their shifting contexts. Such cannot occur without individual and collective democratic agency, whose exercise may be more or less possible or, indeed, permitted, for specific individuals. Historically, of course, many members of groups in the United States have been systematically denied full democratic agency, including many immigrants, Native Americans, African Americans, Japanese and Chinese Americans, women, Jews and Roman Catholics. There is perhaps no concern more essential to the achievement of democratic change than the unfettered exercise of agency by individuals and their collectives. Realizing that condition is supremely difficult, especially in conditions of pluralism, which permit human beings persistent opportunities to “other” on the basis of their perceived differences. These interviews demonstrate how complex and multi-layered efforts to ensure the agency of a population to exercise that faculty on its own behalf can be to secure. And yet, democracy amidst pluralism cannot endure in the long-lived absence of such conditions.

This book's interviews take the reader into the complexities of democratic change and, ultimately, they counsel modesty among those who would seek to lead or encourage such efforts. They also counsel patience and development of a sense of prudential possibility as one learns about a population, what it perceives its real or imagined needs to be and what factors are likely to mediate alternative courses of action. While one may seek to work first with coalitions of the like-minded, these interviews suggest that those alone are unlikely by themselves to yield sustainable change, especially amidst populations enmeshed in abiding conflict or undergoing difficult circumstances. At some point, in order to secure a new sustainable community imaginary or way of knowing, would-be change agents must seek to raise the consciousness of those wedded to the prevailing frame, and they must do so in ways that allow those democratic agents to make their own choices for change, a sobering, if nonetheless bracing, reality. Clearly, community development roles are not for the faint of heart or the individual who imagines "saving" a population from itself by means of one or another supposed technical fix or bromide. Democracy allows no such possibility and individual freedom actually forbids it. These interviews suggest that true friends of democratic change must operate within that sharp paradox. This volume demonstrates, too, that many professionals are doing so with honor and vigor. I urge you to reflect actively on these conversations. I know you will find them at once challenging and energizing.

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Chapter 1: Andy Morikawa

The Evolution of the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance Community Change Collaborative

Andy Morikawa, Senior Fellow, Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance

Date of Interview: October 10, 2018

Interviewers: Neda Moayerian, Lara Nagle

Ed. Note: As we suggested in the Acknowledgments, Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance Senior Fellow Andy Morikawa has been a key architect of the Community Change Collaborative throughout its evolution. This interview finds participating graduate students reflecting with him on the evolution of the initiative. The upshot is an insightful overview of the aims, pedagogy and purport of an evolving and dynamic educational experiment.

Neda Moayerian: I guess we might want to have some interesting information about the original Global Dialogue, which preceded development of the Community Voices series. How did you change to Community Voices and the speaker and podcast series you helped to initiate? So, for the sake of documentation and for my personal curiosity, can you explain a little bit about the evolution of the Global Dialogue?

Andy Morikawa: The Global Dialogue was born out of a kind of a dream, I suppose—I'm not quite sure what the right word is—when several friends gathered and we were reflecting on some of the people that we had been really privileged to have gotten to know from Mexico, from Sri Lanka, from The U.S., from the Native-American community, from the African-American community and we just wondered what would it be like if we could get so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so in the same room and spend an afternoon talking with one another. Wouldn't that be neat? Out of that “just supposing” came the Global Dialogue. It was an opportunity to bring together you know just a tremendous cross-section of leaders and

experienced people in community change: Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, from Sri Lanka, who has now organized, I think it's 30,000 villages in Sri Lanka and helped their populations build capacity to help themselves over a long period of time; a Navajo friend who had been working on revitalizing youth and youth concerns among others.

And the conversations that we had were so rich, and the connections between people from such different life experiences, from different perspectives, with a common sense of how important it is that we engage together for community change, that there is so much to be done and so much to be learned from one another. Some of the best conversations unfortunately weren't recorded. During a break people would go off by themselves and talk and exchange ideas and that led, in a sense, to our focus on documenting our conversations, to record them. I've experienced that around the Community Voices table. All of a sudden there will be this conversation going. It's like, oh my goodness, what a tremendous series of insights that just got generated by this group of folks. And then it's gone.

Moayerian: Yes.

Morikawa: You can kind of remember it, but maybe nobody even took notes from it. Since then, that's why we have focused as much attention and time and some expense on the recordings, out of a sense that there's a rich body of knowledge that's being created. It's not like people are saying things that have never been said before, I think. You know something new is being created in the moment when you have this rich engagement between graduate students, for example, and the speakers for the Community Voices speakers' series.

Lara Nagle: How was Community Voices started and how did you become involved in this initiative?

Morikawa: It's started earlier than 2010 and it was a conversation with Max Stephenson and myself and a professor who has since passed away [Wolfgang Natter]. We had a conversation that led to the idea of having Community Voices and at that time, and I think consistently throughout, we've seen Community Voices as providing a space for the university and the community to meet around innovations for community change, kind of broadly speaking.

At the beginning, 2009-2010, we at first wanted to start a TEDx program, and actually a lot of our practices, particularly at the beginning, were modeled on the TED talks. But then one of our members, one of the faculty members, I think it was Jim Dubinsky [VT English Department], said, no, let's do something of our own, instead of trying to mimic TED and become a TEDx site. Let's just keep it Community Voices and maybe adopt or adapt some of the practices that we could pick up from the TED talks, and so we did.

One of the talks, I think, I don't know if it was exactly our very first one, but one of the first ones remains most outstanding in my mind, and that was Dudley Cocks. What we had planned was that we would interview speakers ahead of time and we would provide them a pretty extensive orientation and go through a several-step process with them. And we were very prescriptive. We said, 15-16 minutes, no more than that. Your talk needed not to be boilerplate, something that you've done before, but something new, something innovative, and we would talk to you about that.

And so, I remember Max [Stephenson] and I, and maybe some of the students, would go out and visit people and interview them and provide them orientation about our expectations, and we'd come back and we put a lot of a lot of effort into it. Since then, we've kind of shifted that model, but the same framework and the same aim to provide a creative space between community and the Academy remains. And, so that spirit has been maintained, and we've done some variations on that basic theme. Coming back to Dudley's talk: It was at the Lyric Theatre. We used to do all of the talks at the Lyric Theatre and we would videotape them and do post-production work on them, so they were actually very nicely produced programs. And Dudley's was a completely bare stage. No podium. No lectern. Just a lavalier mike and him walking across the stage doing his presentation. You can still see it on video. It was just very, very well done.

The other one that again stands out is Anthony Flaccavento, and this was long before he was even thinking about going into politics. Both of them really followed our recommendations to a T. They had really rehearsed. It was unique. They did it without notes and just both were very, very impressive.

Nagle: As you were talking about how you structured the interview process, and recruited interviewers, and how that changed based on need and lessons

learned, I'm curious if the structure changed to be more inclusive in a way, if it was necessary to change your outreach approach. How did you frame community change, and maybe reframe what community change is over time?

Morikawa: I think we have always been pretty open about it. If somebody sounded interesting, we were interested in them and there was no real strict set of standards about the kind of work somebody was doing, but we would look at the work and say, well, that's really interesting, and so we'd invite them.

Nagle: Were there themes that came forward on a regular basis that you saw linking up over the years?

Morikawa: I think one of them, and maybe it's me looking for something like this idea of building capacity for community to help itself, but I think that has always been a real interest to us in one way or another.

Nagle: And did you find that there were individual changes made to the facilitation process based on who is facilitating any given session?

Morikawa: That's a great question. At an early point, and I think maybe you guys weren't involved in that because we've gone through several versions of it, but we had a standard set of questions, three or four questions, and we asked everybody the same questions. One of the things we learned from that was that those four questions were departure points. They were ways to get started, and very often we would end up at a very different place than the direction that the questions were setting us in, which led us to where we are today: Each team of interviewers, as far as I know, develops its own questions. You're not going from a formula that we developed two or three years ago.

Something that relates to this is, good questions are not easy. When you see a good question, it's worth keeping. I've got a notebook at home where I keep questions, and they don't necessarily apply all the time to something, but invariably I can go back to that list of really great questions and use it as the basis for another question.

Moayerian: Did Trustees without Borders come from the Community Voices series?

Morikawa: At the same time that Community Voices was getting started, I was doing a radio program called Talk at the Table on the Virginia Tech station, WUVT, and when I stopped doing that for various reasons, Trustees Without Borders was next. And that's when it became a podcast. So, essentially, we went from a live FM radio broadcast to a podcast, which we have found much easier to manage.

Nagle: And what kind of content was Talk at the Table?

Morikawa: That was more generalized. It was just a program for anybody in the community that I thought was interesting to talk to. And so, we would have musicians come in and sometimes they would sing and talk, or a band would come in and we'd do that. There are a good number of the shows that were recorded.

Moayerian: You have so many years of experience in NGOs, running very diverse programs, how do you see Community Voices, and now Community Change Collaborative, as different or unique?

Morikawa: I really think what is so unique about the Community Change Collaborative, and before it, Community Voices, and even before that, the Global Dialogue, is the space that's created when the university and the community come together in an intentional way to engage with one another and to come up with a design for that interaction. To me, what we've been doing is developing, in a sense, an architecture of engagement, bringing the university and the community together. Sometimes we do very well at it, sometimes not as well. I think there is, at least in this local community, a real hesitation, or a sense of caution on the part of the community, in getting engaged with the university, feeling overwhelmed, perhaps, or feeling used as kind of an experimentation bench: "We'll get engaged with you as long as you're useful to us, but then we're gone and we may never see you again." So the work that we've been doing with Montgomery and Pennington Gap, for me has been a real big step. And we're now, in a sense, in the second and third generation steps with all of those communities, instead of just having gone in, done a workshop and left. We've maintained a relationship, and we're going to continue to come at it with a real sense of humility. In other words, we don't have any answers.

You know, Max [Stephenson] has been really insistent on the idea that,

“We’re not here to do your strategic planning. That’s not our purpose, but what is it that we can do to help you better understand the situation that you find yourselves in? Are there things that we can do, research for you, that are going to help?” And both of you [Moayerian and Nagle] have been very much involved in that kind of process. I feel very encouraged, not just encouraged, but excited about the possibility that the resources of a great land grant research university like Virginia Tech can be brought to bear on terrible issues, like economic development for a whole region that was based on extractive economies that are dead. What’s next for these communities? Are they going to die and just go away? I don’t think so. I think we’ve found signs that there’s tremendous vitality. It’s a bias on my part, but I think that there’s a vitality here that the rest of the country needs and a sense of community that’s not a “tree-hugger” sense of community, kind of airy fairy, but a very tough sense of what it takes to survive and to flourish. And that spirit, again, is helping us to define this architecture of engagement where the university and the community can come together and develop a partnership out of which will grow real innovation.

Nagle: Yes, there’s nothing like learning from these communities, I think. I had a job sort of like this when I first finished college. I was placed in a community for a year. We were working on an eco-tourism project to connect these trail towns to our rail trail that was up and coming. So, it was a real eye opener and I kind of wish that I had gone through this experience before I had that job, because sometimes even the community members expect you to fix things.

Moayerian: Many times.

Nagle: So, it’s really difficult to flip that expectation, not knowing yourself what your role is really, and I think that learning from community members and all of their lived experience has been one of the most useful aspects of our involvement. Personally, I feel that way and I think we have seen already some positive feedback from Pennington Gap in the use of the report that summarized their community visioning and helped them prioritize their next steps.

Moayerian: As we all know, Community Voices is now the Community Change Collaborative and is a volunteer effort among graduate students, faculty members and professionals. So how do you think it works with these

tight schedules that so many of us have? What is the attraction of it and how can we make it better, in your view?

Morikawa: Gosh I'm not sure. Actually sometimes I've wondered. I've thought, boy, I wonder why the graduate students are putting so much into it, because you guys have.

Moayerian: You, too.

Morikawa: One, we share an interest in community change, I think. We have a real curiosity in getting to know and to hear from people who are engaged in in real community change. And maybe just the idea of being able to capture it, memorialize it in some way, that it will continue on, but it will be accessible later.

Nagle: I think also, you touched on earlier, the series produces these spontaneous vibrant moments of lively discussion. I think that's why I like this group. There are people who are constantly challenging things and are critically questioning, an orientation that to some extent is lacking, at least at the master's degree level. I know we're thinking critically about things but it's not always a theoretical perspective. Whereas, I look to the Ph.D. students to kind of guide some of that reasoning. It's just like I said, I've been learning a lot from our projects, always from speakers. And it's very good experience, you know. It makes it relatable, transferable to I think a lot of jobs we'll have in the future.

Morikawa: I wonder, too, around the Community Voices table, now the Community Change Collaborative table, if there's a little less, there's a little more freedom.

Moayerian: Yes, it's a safe space.

Morikawa: That's exactly right. It's a safe space. And out of that comes this kind of generative capacity.

Moayerian: Exactly.

Morikawa: That's really what brings me back here and what grieves me at times is all of you guys end up leaving!

Nagle: That's one problem with the turnover.

Morikawa: It's a very real problem. But from the beginning, it's just been consistent, just an exceptional group of people. And it's always diverse and different points of view, different backgrounds, people coming from different countries, different cultures, and it's always this rich conversation. There's this shared sense of curiosity, openness to ideas, a real interest in hearing somebody who has an interesting idea.

Moayerian: Dr. Stephenson was just telling us about the idea and the concept of wonder, and I was thinking, it's exactly true about Community Voices. I always go to the meetings and I wonder, what's going on? What's today's talk about? And our conversation is always unfolding in many different ways across our discussions.

Morikawa: I think what's key is that we meet every week. I really like that. I think that's essential.

Nagle: To your relationships, too. Because if you don't feel comfortable around people, it's not a safe space, really. Like you have to get to know people in your group to have that.

Getting back to themes and trends over time, would you say that they are coming from a direction in terms of critical theory, for example, that they are often representing a minority voice or thinking beyond the norm, that there's a dominant world view and then there are things that are ignored, that are falling between the cracks? Or does community change inherently lend itself to these qualitative methods that are more constructivist and that highlight multiple truths, multiple realities? And truly to conduct community change and be inclusive, we have to look beyond the dominant world view? So, this is getting into a theory question. I hope it's not totally off the wall because I'm also just learning about these concepts, but do you find that across the speakers that have come over the years, that there's this mindedness about how to approach people?

Morikawa: Yeah, I would say yes and that it's something shared around the table as well by the graduate students and the faculty who have participated in Community Voices, and now the Community Change Collaborative. To me, it's about relationships, and that is about a leadership of relationships: that there is a shared vision, sense of purpose, intention for a community that in very parochial terms, I suppose, works for everybody, the sense that

there's a place and there's respect for everybody at the table, and that it's achieved through relationships, more than rules or laws, though those are absolutely vital. But underpinning all of that is a leadership of relationships and I think that on top of that, and we're a part of that, is being shaped by this architecture of engagement, of how we relate to one another. And I think that Community Voices, Community Change Collaborative, that we provide moments in time where people with this shared sense of purpose come together and in a sense celebrate that there is no self-congratulatory work at this table. It's just this sense of coming together, being disciplined, being—the research base, I think, really helps so it's not just kind of pie in the sky, but really grounded, a grounded sense of what's happening. How do we understand this? How do we frame and understand what we're seeing and experiencing?

Max [Stephenson] does that so well, bringing so many different perspectives and he's so fluent in that. And out of that, we're learning by actually doing it, so we're not just talking about it, but we're actually practicing, so that kind of dialogue and conversation that takes place around this table has grown over time, and what's neat is that the people who were here five years ago are all gone, and yet the conversation is still taking place.

And so, it's this sense that we're developing through this leadership of relationships, this architecture, this way of engaging with one another, and in a larger sense, through the work with Pennington Gap and Montgomery and now Stuart, we're beginning to figure out a design. What does this really look like? And it's not a linear: "If I do one and two, then three will happen." It's like, "If I do one, seven might happen, or eight might happen." It's just this sense of, it all is connected. It really is. We know that it is, but what does that mean? And I think part of it is faith, I guess. You know that if we do step out in faith around this table that it's going to make a difference in Pennington Gap. It's going to make a difference in Montgomery. And you may not be able to prove it in that sense, but you have this deep-seated sense that I'm a part of something. I'm a part of something that is going to bring about change that is respectful of all, that is responsible, and that I can be proud of.

Nagle: I think that describes some of these qualitative methods that I'm reading about this semester in one of my classes. It's the researcher being very intentional in wanting to do something beyond themselves that helps others, that is ethical, but is not necessarily generalizable to everybody. It's

having a faith that what you're doing will help in this circumstance and not being so concerned that it's generalizable, in the way that, from a positivist point of view, this is statistically significant and that's why I am doing it.

Morikawa: I guess that's commodifying it.

Nagle: Yeah.

Moayerian: Exactly.

Nagle: It is normalizing it, statistically. So, I think a lot of that rings true with more of the theoretical side. I'm reading about qualitative research design and methods, so, that is very interesting.

I guess I want to ask just one more thing, that you mentioned at some point, you brought up, how does a group analyze itself critically, itself internally? And I think we kind of do that iteratively, as we go, but I think it would be interesting to do it more systematically.

Morikawa: I do, too. I think you voiced something very important. It's this sense of, it's one thing to have "other knowing" and it's something else to have self-knowing. I think the two are intimately connected, self and other knowing. I think it would be great to take it on. I think it would be neat to ask you guys to come up with what you think we should do, what would be a good way of doing that.

Nagle: Yeah. that's something we should mull, I think.

Moayerian: Thank you so much for your thoughts. I really found many of the things you shared fantastic. I didn't know about many of them really, and I'm really happy we did this talk. Thank you so much.

PART I: EXPLORING THE
DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITY
CHANGE

Chapter 2: Amy Brooks

Amy Brooks, Program Director and Dramaturge for Roadside Theater

Date of Interview: October 30, 2017

Interviewers: Neda Moayerian, Vanessa Guerra, Andy Morikawa

Vanessa Guerra: Amy, you connect people across perceived cultural differences. How does that happen and what are the challenges and opportunities?

Amy Brooks: Connecting people across “perceived” cultural differences, that is an interesting text, too. It should say “real,” they are not just perceived. They are real cultural differences. It’s true and they’ve never been probably more prominent since the Civil War, than they are at this moment. I would say that a couple of keys to connecting people across them is through the work of arts and culture being used as a catalyst to activate equitable development. In the service of that, helping people understand that these differences have always been among us. It’s just that the framework for the conversation has changed.

At Appalshop we like to argue that it’s not by accident, that it’s the result of national politics putting things in a 40-year framework of “anti-community” policy, a sort of “top-down engine” that’s designed to strip communities of their agency, their ownership, their belonging and their ability to reconcile these differences and move forward in constructive ways. And that begins with a conversation, which for us at Roadside Theater, begins with storytelling. We like to use the story circle as a tool for building empathy and helping people create new inter-cultural and place-based plays that are of, by, and for working class rural and urban people.

Neda Moayerian: For disadvantaged community members participating in Roadside Theater projects, how do you change the image of theater, or more broadly art, from a luxury good serving only a few, to an experience for everyone?

Brooks: My initial reaction, especially having come up through a mainstream,

kind of elite arts training in the Northeast, is that it is not an image, that it is a reality. If people perceive theater in America as primarily an elite pastime, then they're right. I don't think they should be forced to apologize for not engaging with theater, when theater (for many, many years now, possibly since it became so centralized in Broadway) fails to reflect whole communities, to make its products available to whole communities, except in a kind of a trickle-down, economics kind of model.

If our primary example of excellence in American theaters is *Hamilton*, then I think that, without disavowing any of the virtuosity, or the beauty or the importance of the conversation that's happening on that stage, we need to be asking why that it costs \$800 a ticket to witness that production. I realize that some people manage to get in there for a couple hundred bucks instead, but that might as well be \$2 million to the kind of community member that we typically work with at Roadside. So, asking, "Who's in the house?" is one of the most important questions we can raise. Then, asking, how these community members that we work with (who may never have been exposed to professional theater), "How are they steeped in storytelling and performance?" Because many communities have their own tradition and it doesn't have to be the Scots-Irish tradition that a lot of Roadside performers know well. African-American communities have their own storytelling traditions and that helped Roadside form, back in the 1970s. That tradition has always been an influence on us, too. Finding out people's traditions and ways of performing and telling stories is our way of not rehabilitating, but actually changing, the activities, in the face of what theater can mean to the average American.

Guerra: Going along with discovering people's traditions, what kind of capabilities do active participants of these projects as individuals, achieve at the end, both directly and indirectly, and in different forms, such as social, economic, and political?

Brooks: I would say communication is probably the first thing that comes to mind. I think that the story circle methodology and then the playmaking, the community-based playmaking process that might result in that. It begins with the communication of, "Yes, I'm willing to be in the room with these people with whom I might have really profound differences." Or it could be a bunch of people that I already know, but we're going to sit in a circle and communicate with each other and not make it about direct political

questioning, but about questions that tend to evoke empathy. We're going to be willing to communicate and connect in that way first.

The other direct change I would say might be perception. I like to think that we create the conditions for people to identify the capabilities they already have, that maybe have never been capitalized on. So many people have skills, talents, leadership abilities that they are never really taught to hone or told that they're not allowed to display. Maybe they're told they're the wrong kind of person or maybe they've been the direct objects of some kind of systemic violence that even kept them from realizing this potential. People have different reasons—they come from different backgrounds and have very individual personalities—for not accessing their own capabilities, but everyone has them. And when you put people in conversation with each other, across some of these silos and sectors and communities, they start to discover those in conversation with each other, much more quickly than they might if they were alone or not sharing stories to help them connect. Those capabilities are always there.

Guerra: So, empathy and perception seems to be the main things that active participants get out of these wonderful projects. What about passive participants?

Brooks: Roadside historically does not allow people to observe our story circles. We ask that people participate, so that's a central tenet of the work that we do. And, in fact, Roadside's performance style comes out of a storytelling tradition that has no "fourth wall," which, for anybody who is not versed in theater, means that when you're inside a building, people have to pretend there's a wall where the stage floor ends. We don't do that. We engage the audience directly. It's not unusual, especially in the older days, when Roadside was doing performances that were so deeply steeped in the church tradition and the music and the common Appalachian ballads of the areas of southwestern Virginia and eastern Kentucky, not unusual at all for audience members to start shouting out questions, to start completing the stories along with the performers who were also raised in this tradition, and to sing along during the musical numbers and even to get up and play instruments with the participants. We rank participation and agency really, really highly in the work that we do, whether we're performing for elementary school children or communities in a coal camp or in a residency in some other community outside of Appalachia.

Moayerian: Speaking about these, do you have examples where a cultural project has led the actor or the audience to rethink their assumptions or create new imaginaries regarding an issue at the individual or community level? If so, could you please share an example with us?

Brooks: There are so many, it's hard to choose. Let me think. One of our recent playmaking projects is called the Letcher County Play and this is a process that began in about 2015. The goal was to ascertain what Letcher County residents thought would be the right economic future, or what they envisioned for their own economic future, in the wake of, basically, the exit of the coal industry from our region.

Now, I should say that Appalshop is located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, which is in Letcher County and this is the 5th Congressional District which is, if not the, at least one of the sickest and poorest congressional districts in the United States. We have about twice the national disability rate, for example. Our people die on average about 10 years sooner than the average American citizen. These are individuals who are living with severe economic disadvantage and yet they have an incredibly rich, beautiful, vibrant culture and tradition of storytelling. Unfortunately, this has been treated as just another extractive industry where people come in, take the arts and the storytelling, portray it without the primary stakeholders, and make a buck with it somewhere else.

People have been sort of taught to perceive the arts as an extractive industry, akin to coal mining. But that's changing, and part of the reason for that is Appalshop's leadership and part of that is the incredible capabilities of the residents, and the internet helping bring Letcher County's population to more awareness of national dialogues.

With all these changes, we thought that it would be a good idea to check in with people, especially younger leaders in Letcher County, and produce an intergenerational play from multiple perspectives. This is a key to Roadside storytelling—multiple perspectives on an issue are always represented so that we're not just being polemical.

The way we always create plays is by a series of community story circles. One of the newest participants in that process, at that time, was Ben Fink. He is now the organizing director of Appalshop's Letcher County Culture

Hub, which really arose from his experience as a new Appalshop employee going around attending story circles at people's libraries and schools and community centers. Hearing their stories and the kind of narrative sense they were making of their shared economic concerns led him to start organizing in this more story-based way.

That has resulted not just in radically increased agency, communication, and intentionality in the economic development and organizing that's happening around Letcher County. It has also changed the methodology we employ at Roadside. We've always been an organizing theater company, a political theater company, but the involvement of Ben [Ben Fink] in Letcher County has helped us do that in a much more intentional way.

We were all participants in that process, from our various points of view. Cultural imaginary is a really beautiful term for what another partner of ours calls "unbinding the imagination," about how this act of just making a play together, that expresses our doubts and confusions about our future and of conflicting viewpoints represented fairly, can set off a wave of changes in our communities, that's reflected on so many different levels.

Guerra: That is such a great impact that you can create with this project and relate it to the potential of this process. Have you ever observed a collective action by the community following, for example, a play by Roadside Theater, that could be linked to that play?

Brooks: Well, just in terms of transparency, I have to say that I haven't been around long enough to observe that happening in communities outside of Letcher County. I know that it has happened in the past. The one that I've observed that I can speak to, first hand, is that after a reading of the Letcher County Play, we always do a story circle or a community dialogue. It's an iterative process. What we did after the reading of the Letcher County Play at Seedtime on the Cumberland, this past year (Appalshop's cultural and music festival) was to ask people to share their own stories or respond to the points-of-view that they heard in the Letcher County Play. We asked about whether we should persist with coal mining, whether there was any future for that, whether we should try to diversify the economy, whether it was worth a try to stay and have children there.

A lot of citizens don't always have a safe framework in which to have these

conversations. The story circle or audience sharing portion in this case became kind of a public forum for debate about these concerns. There were conflicting viewpoints that were represented there. In that case, I would say that the action was people following up with us for information or wanting to follow the progress of the Letcher County Culture Hub, so that they might stage the play in their own communities, in and around Letcher County.

Moayerian: How would community art projects sustain the change they create? Are they positioned to do so? For example, if they want to create some sort of transformation in people's minds, if they should see a new future with each other, or if they create that future and they want to build on that. Is there any sustainability to these changes in their perspectives? Do you check with them or follow-up on this question?

Brooks: I think that is an organizing question that far predates the organizing that we're doing at Appalshop. That's the big question. It's a nonprofit question, too. It's capacity. We can do almost anything on a very small scale or for a short period of time, but how do we stay engaged? I think there are a number of attempts to put a more sustainable model in place with this. You framed it really well in the question, which is that it's a transformation that happens in people's minds. We don't make those changes for them. We help create the conditions for them to begin to make those changes in communication with each other. So, while we facilitate, we bring our own methodology and our training and our backgrounds and the art we produce, we bring that into their circles in their communities.

But really, again we're back to this idea that the capacity is already there for them to lead, to organize, and to create changes for themselves. We hope that the work that we do (whether it's playmaking or a more intentional form of economic development), we hope that it activates that part of their mind that is capable of unbinding from these systems that they're in right now. We hope it enables them to, through the will of the community, to continue to act, even after we're gone.

The length of our residencies varies a lot. It can be a three-day training residency for the work that we do, or we basically just familiarize people with a story circle methodology, stage a few circles, facilitate a dialogue about a possible plan of action for them and then we're gone. The conversation may or may not continue after that, depending on their will. If they want to

check back in with us and continue the dialogue, then we're almost always available in that capacity. Ultimately the decision is up to the will of the party or parties in a community that are driving this action.

In some cases, these long-term intercultural exchanges in residences we've had with groups like Idiwanan An Chawe, which is a Zuni theater company in Zuni, New Mexico, have occurred for more than 30 years. That relationship has involved long-term community cultural exchanges, where we go there and stay with Zuni tribe members, go to their churches and meet their families and create art together. They also come to Whitesburg, Kentucky, meet people here and see how we live. I would call that an example of extreme sustainability that's become intergenerational, as both Roadside employees and families and their Zuni counterparts are now passing their traditions down to younger participants.

But in terms of being able to check back in, it's not a thing that we have. We don't have a great data tracking system in place. It would be really useful and we're talking about ways to innovate that. It really kind of goes to show that Roadside's activities began in 1975 and a lot of it predates the technology! We do statistics. We track statistics. In fact, our managing directors are probably really mad at me right now because I need to go back to the office and do that! We track statistics about which segments of the community that we've served, the demographic breakdown of our audience. A lot of it comes in the form of grant reports and staff tracking. That's a good question, how to stay engaged, how to check back in, because we're always asking how to make it more iterative.

Guerra: Perhaps it is too soon to judge the socio-economic impact of the Culture Hub in which you are working. What are your thoughts about the idea of the Culture Hub, that is, of your current project? In your opinion, how does it help individuals in the community to broaden their imagination and choices? What more can be done to make the Hub more successful in promoting the participating communities' livelihoods?

Brooks: Well, first off, I feel very shy about speaking for any of the participants in the Culture Hub. I'm a Roadside Theater member and I live and work in Southwest Virginia. I'm not a Letcher County resident and I'm not a primary stakeholder in that effort, except as an employee really. It's not my business that stands to succeed or fail, on that basis. I'm not a community

organizer. I'm an artist who works alongside community organizers and tries in my own work to lift up theirs and their organizing efforts. I just want to position myself there, in my answer. I'm going to try to quote from memory, the responses that the participants and stakeholders in the Culture Hub have given and that we've recorded.

We've started, and this is a major take away about the Culture Hub that we've had so far, we've started in great depth and very narrow scope there in Letcher County. It seemed to us the most reasonable way to start, and I would say that there's been a very high degree of success in communities there, because they've told us so, even just in the capacity of getting them in a room together to talk about how their businesses, their not-for-profit agencies, their government organizations, their volunteer fire departments, or their artisan groups, can more effectively communicate and coordinate their activities so that they're not competing for resources, but instead supporting, leveraging and helping each other. That's been a major piece of the feedback, just, "Oh my gosh, we're communicating so much better. It never occurred to us to put our resources together and communicate with each other in this way. This incredible work has been happening all around us. Our whole lives we've been doing this work and we never thought to really get in a room together, because some of us just don't like each other that much!"

And that's OK. It's helping these people see, whoever they voted for, whatever viewpoint they have on social issues, that they're in an economic boat together, without glossing over any of the really important issues that too often get brushed aside as identity politics. I can't stand it when people use that as an excuse to silence such conversations.

There has been some benefit to people focusing on the economic aspect, because they are in the same boat there in Letcher County. At this point, because of the Culture Hub, Ben's organizing, and Appalshop and Roadside's participation in helping bring these incredible people together, they are experiencing more success in their businesses and agencies. They are now presenting their own work in their communities on the national scale, which is the next phase of our work.

So, I can only answer for what we've done in Letcher County so far. We're only just now starting to go into the phase where it's a national proposition.

It's going to look, and land, and be adopted and be implemented really differently in communities that have different compositions and different needs to address. That's as it should be.

Guerra: That's fantastic.

Moayerian: In an interview with Ben Fink, who you mentioned earlier, he observed that the idea of tourism development among the Letcher County community and the Culture Hub are totally different from what had been planned and practiced by authorities. Do you think that the Culture Hub can be a catalyst for change in such policies, and, if so, how should they proceed?

Brooks: I think it can be. This is one of those moments where it's useful to remember that whatever people perceive about the voters, or the orientation to outsiders that people have in eastern Kentucky, or their feelings about tourism in general, or if people like to think, "Well, that's just a place where there's just a bunch of Trump voters," only 30 percent of the area's people voted in the last election. It's primarily a place where people have lost a great deal of faith in any kind of social infrastructure, which is represented by the outside world. They've lost so much faith that they prefer not to participate at all, to rely on the local structures that have given them success, that have given them solace. I know that there's a contradiction in this because we are still living in the midst of the remnants of an extractive economy, so that might sound ridiculous, but that contradiction does exist in the community.

I do think that the Culture Hub has the capacity to transform that conversation, simply by virtue of the fact that in areas where there has not traditionally been a really high level of civic participation, I say traditionally, and I have to check myself, because there has been, in the past, a public forum for that kind of conversation, when there were things such as active union halls. It's true, there's a great history of democratic labor organizing and civic participation in this part (Central) of Appalachia. But it's been deconstructed. It's been put down, through the "anti-community" policies that I mentioned earlier for a long time. It's like this war of attrition on people there.

I don't think I'm telling tales out of school to say that for many citizens it is common to argue that if, "it's the government, they're so corrupt!" And they'll

say it, they'll say it on a national platform, they're really upfront about it. I think the Culture Hub is putting these people, these citizens, in control of the public conversation, in a way that has not been the case for a while. I think it's re-engaging eastern Kentuckians and southwestern Virginians in that capacity.

I do think that it's going to, not just transform it on the local level, but by virtue of the success of the work, it is going once again to put these people in conversation with people in similar circumstances in other communities, throughout the United States. Once we start connecting communities in that way, not through the government necessarily, not through a top down method of organizing, but through people's own impetus to go out and connect to communities and see how they're living there, the whole conversation is likely to change and tourism itself to be redefined, as a different way to experience a community.

Moayerian: I'm very interested in that view of yours that tourism should change its view of the community, as seeing the rural as some consumption good, available for city dwellers to go there and "see" residents like any other objects, like seeing mountains, for example. As an artist, what is your perception about asset-based tourism? Do you think that what culture and what art are bringing to people should be commodified or do you have some approach to avoid that, valorizing the culture, not just making it another good for sale?

Brooks: As I mentioned, arts in the past have often been treated as an extractive industry. You'll see plays and movies and mainstream music that incorporate Appalachian cultural heritage, music, styles of storytelling and performance. But how does that materially benefit our communities is the big question? Who benefits is always at the root of everything that Appalshop does, that Roadside does, that the Culture Hub is seeking to address. It's encouraging people to ask those questions, too.

The tenet of the Culture Hub that Ben likes to repeat and repeat and repeat, and I think it's a very good one for artists, too, is "we own what we make." It sounds oversimplified, but this idea that we have these incredible resources in our community, the value that we create through this storytelling, the song of the artisanal art making and crafts and, yes, our theater belongs to us, its creators. The idea that we could be the ones to materially benefit from

that in our communities as opposed to a wealthy producer in New York City or some other relatively privileged entity outside of our region, who typically benefits from our efforts, is a huge thing. That's really, really important and I think that that conversation is just as important in the arts, if not more important. Just because arts tend to be, "Oh, we have a sharing orientation, it's all good. It's not cultural appropriation, it's just sharing cultural influences and incorporating it into our own." It's all very loosey-goosey and this is how artists are taught to think. But I believe that that's because arts, like everything else, have been touched by unregulated capitalism, and this is so not my area of expertise. I'm not an economist. I'm going to shut myself down a little bit here. I'm an artist who hangs with economists. But we have this simple tenet of "we own what we make" and the idea that communities in eastern Kentucky and in Virginia might start to actually see some benefit from a non-extractive arts production.

Then, fears of gentrification are allayed as well. As you know, we've already started having these conversations that people have come in from the outside and said, "Well, you know, if this takes off, how do you know your community is not going to be gentrified?" It's not that the development that comes with gentrification, in and of itself, is necessarily bad. It's who's in control of the decisions that are made and who derives the benefit from that. Is the development what the community needs? It's not that growth is bad, in and of itself. In fact, we need it very badly. But the people who are producing that value must be in control of that conversation, about how we choose to develop collectively. I really wouldn't separate artists too much from the mainstream of the conversation because we're in it, the same as the volunteer fire department.

Guerra: We wanted to ask, what are the future steps for these projects and processes, what are you working on?

Brooks: The future for the Performing our Future initiative, which is really what we're describing here, is this partnership between Roadside Theater, the Letcher County Culture Hub, and some of our national partners, Imagining America, Artists and Scholars in Public Life and EEGLP, the Economic Empowerment and Global Learning Project at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania. We've got all these partners and these components and we're winding down this first phase of our work. We're distilling our takeaways and we're now presenting the work that has happened so far.

We've got some takeaways and generally speaking they are—I'm going to test my memory here—"Go deep and then go broad." This idea I've expressed is that you have a test community, where you can explore things on a sustainable level, in a controlled environment, and see how that does before you try to take it national.

Focus on voice, agency, ownership, and belonging, so that the power stays where it needs to stay, which is in the hands, the consciences, the imaginations, and the hearts of the primary stakeholders in communities. They typically get the raw end of these economic development deals, which the arts are very guilty of as well. If you've read anything about art washing, very well-intentioned artists go into communities and practice their craft for development, that really ends up being very top down and not benefiting the community at all. We're determined to avoid that, as much as we can.

The third is that the role of an organizer is key to the work that we're doing. That is what's often missing from these arts initiatives, someone who preferably is of the community, but that's not always possible. Ben is always very quick to position himself for exactly who he is, which is, as he says, a socialist Jew from the northeast. If you're honest and put it right out there, then people are a lot more inclined to accept you for who you are, not trying to pretend that you're of that community.

Beginning to work with Ben, with the organizing in a more intentional way as I've mentioned, has helped transform even Roadside's long-term orientation to organizing. It's a very exciting new phase of our work. A big next step for us is connecting to communities that are undergoing the things that we are, who are seeking just transitions—they're de-industrialized—who are looking for new ways to develop equitably, who are trying to reconcile these internal conflicts and a generational turnover. A lot of different places and a lot of different communities have started to ask questions about the work and how they might get involved.

We're speaking with a really great organizer in Baltimore right now. West Baltimore has been the site of Roadside's work historically, in a community with which we still have great ties. We are not interested in a solely rural conversation. That's just not what anyone needs right now. The people who live there believe very deeply in the beauty of their communities and they love rural! But staying in a silo is not what any community needs right

now. Appalshop has always had a rural/urban orientation and we're going to continue to build bridges with our urban partners.

Guerra: That leads to the question, what would be your advice to anyone who is interested in getting involved?

Brooks: Just a tiny little bit of info about me. I'm going to talk a little bit about the talk that I'm giving here tonight that I called, "I don't belong. You don't belong. Let's not belong together," which sort of speaks to my history and background of feeling like, "I couldn't do this work. Who am I. I'm nobody." I'm kind of shy. I mostly keep to myself. I really like listening to and observing people. I love conversations, but I never would have thought of myself as an organizer at all, or a leader in any way, which indeed I'm not. I follow more than I lead at Appalshop, because I'm surrounded by people who have been doing this for a really long time. Maybe that's some advice right there, don't try to reinvent the wheel!

And this is the Ella Baker school of organizing: Find those people who are already doing the work in communities, who are of, and for, and by their communities. Learn from them, follow them, listen to what they have to say. As you start to do that, you will learn that all your skills are important, no matter your background or perspective or whether you feel like you're the kind of person who can be doing this kind of work ... those distinctions tend to melt away really, really quickly when you recognize a shared goal or a common need that everyone can identify, especially a very extreme one. There is no wrong kind of person to be doing organizing work or to help organizers. Everyone's skills are needed.

As a matter of fact, if we don't start to incorporate these radical differences in our own silos and backgrounds, then we're not going to get anywhere in this conversation, in this work that we have to do. Even if you think that you can't do this work or you can't help, I promise you, you can. I found that out.

Moayerian: As someone not from the United States, I'm a little bit curious about whether a hegemonic relationship exists between urban and rural areas in the United States. If it's possible, could you explain whether people in rural parts want their culture presented as what others conceive as rural, or do they want to be, just real?

In their actual lifestyles, they have adopted many modern things, and they

don't want to be assumed as backward or rural. On the other hand, urban people want to see them as different, as though they might say, "Oh, these rural folks, they are very simple. They have a very naive sort of life." Do you know what I'm trying to say? How do rural residents present themselves in their stories? Do you think there's any difference between their reality and their imaginaries?

Brooks: Oh, there's a huge difference, yes, between rural people speaking for themselves. Any idea you have about any uniformity of rural, you can just throw right out the window, because there are way too many people even in small communities to imagine they are all the same. There's no rural monolith. We're really, really different people out here. I don't think it's accidental that these divisions exist, that they've been exacerbated, that certain groups have profited from them, and continue to profit in the market place and in government. I don't think they want a conversation between urban and rural. Just even identifying the obstacles to that conversation and the sources of the images or the imaginaries that you mentioned would be a good place to start. Appalachia has always kind of been "ground zero" for the ugly, redneck, or hillbilly stereotype. Appalshop has made some really gorgeous movies about this. There's one called *Strangers and Kin* that examines the roots of that rural stereotype, the Appalachian stereotype, and how Appalachian people have been depicted since the advent of modern media.

I just think that historical framework is everything. It really, really helps just to recognize our national values, our Anglo national values. Well, let's see, we came to a nation that was 100 percent rural and so much of our identity is, basically, genocide that is all tied up with conquering the rural with westward expansion, with industrialization. You can't separate the dominant American mindset from that historical reality.

So, there are these "ugly hillbilly" stereotypes out there, kind of part and parcel with the Midwestern hayseed farmer with the cowboy hat, the straw in his teeth, riding a tractor, and, oh Lord knows what. Every region that has rural places has a rural stereotype. I think there are, and I mean you can get very small scale with this, there are huge urban and rural divisions, within the state of Kentucky, huge amounts of mistrust between people who live in Louisville and Lexington and people who live in eastern Kentucky. So, it's not unique, it's not new. Again, it's this framework for the conversation that has

changed so, so much and that we need to encourage if these differences are to be addressed, let alone overcome.

A big part of Appalshop's media production, our performance and our organizing is rooted in this idea of the first voice of people in rural, but also urban areas. They are telling their own stories, hopefully face-to-face, in a way so that they can connect empathetically with people who have a different mode of being, a different lifestyle, who live at a different pace and reside in a different cultural context.

My experience has been that those divisions break down with experience, faster than we think they will. Which is not to say that the disagreements and the discords are smoothed over or that they vanish, but you can no longer pretend that the other side is inhuman, somehow, when you have talked with someone personally and heard their story. This is a real distinction and a distinction that sociologists have to make. There have been scales developed, they're numeric scales, I heard about this in a podcast. Now I'm sharing another podcast, so this is like super "loosey-goosey" again. I'm not a sociologist, disclaimer! One, the most innocent being, "Well, I agree with what you're saying, and I sense that you are like me culturally." Then somewhere in the center would be, "Well, I disagree, and I don't like what you're saying, but I can understand where you're coming from." But the farthest end on that scale is, "You are demonic." This is when individuals start to dehumanize and perceive the other side of a cultural binary like urban/rural as no longer human, which is, I think where we are in this moment in our politics at least.

Working with these organizers, all I can say is, you remember to put it in that historical context. You recognize the forces that have made it this way. You try not to come from a really reactionary place, where you're always on the defensive, you set up this binary in your own mind, and start to believe in it that, "Those urban people really have it out for us. They hate us. They hate our way of being."

That's a conversation that is happening on both sides of the coin. I know, because I move back and forth between these worlds. It's about the same in Amherst, Massachusetts, as it is in Whitesburg, Kentucky, not that the communities are identical, but they know about as much, about each other. They're about on that same level of exposure, but it's experiential. You gotta

talk to people who are different than you and that's an urban/rural principle, as well as any other.

Moayerian: My understanding is that media can be a homogenizing force or be a dignifying apparatus for people, to give them a voice, so that every individual will have a different experience and meaning and value for himself or herself.

How do you see art, in general, as dignifying people? Is it possible that everyone has some sort of art that can be an emancipatory power for him or her? How do you see that in a community, especially in rural communities, where people are not very used to using art as expression?

Brooks: Oh, they are, though, they are. Oh, it's incredible. I lived in Dayton, Ohio for about 10 years. It had rural sections, but it's fair sized. It's a small city, and the high school students there could go to a high school of performing arts if they wanted, if they had those natural inclinations and talents. They could go to a high school of performing arts to learn to do the kind of things that young people in eastern Kentucky naturally grow up doing. It's nothing to young people in Letcher County to play five instruments, and sing in church, and go to a bluegrass square dance and then go immediately after that, to a punk show. There's no real distinction or conflict in their minds among these.

It's an incredibly rich cultural center. In fact, I've never been in a place in all the communities I've lived, where there is such rich cultural production, that people eat, sleep, and breathe and tell stories and stage plays. They do the standard high school plays thing, too. They just did a production of a high school musical in Whitesburg, that they were really proud of. It was awesome. But in terms of just the community playmaking, that's something they've been doing forever and a day. And it's not just us, it's any place where people can't afford commodified cultures. Well, they just go out and make their own, and there's an incredibly rich tradition of that in Appalachia and in America.

I would say that radio has probably fared the best, in terms of democratizing culture and the podcast is a huge piece of that. It's become more and more democratic and accessible to people in theater. Mainstream theater, however, has gone in the opposite direction, to become more and more

elite. It serves the 15 percent wealthiest, whitest, best educated segment of every community, in the main. But these seedlings of community playmaking and little projects and storytelling have always been in communities. This tradition is very rich in eastern Kentucky.

Guerra: This discussion has been very, very inspiring and we cannot wait to see these projects grow and affect more people!

Morikawa: Amy, is there anything that we haven't asked you that you'd like to share with us, before we close?

Brooks: Well, I can tell you how to get in touch with us, if you'd like to. We like to hear from people. You can check out Roadside Theater's playmaking and a lot, about 41 years' worth of literature, writing and media is stored on our website, that's Roadside.org. You can check out Appalshop's large institutional profile and the work that we're doing and who we all are at Appalshop.org. If you are interested in learning more about "Performing our Future," which is where Roadside and the Letcher County Culture Hub come into conversation with each other for community cultural and economic development, you can check out PerformingOurFuture.com and the Letcher County Culture Hub now has its own website and I believe it's LetcherCulture.org. You can find out all about the residents of eastern Kentucky and this great organizing work that they're doing there.

Chapter 3: Frank Dukes

Frank Dukes, Director, The Institute for Environmental Negotiation at the University of Virginia (at time of interview)

Date of Interview: September 25, 2013

Interviewers: Anna Erwin, Andy Morikawa

Anna Erwin: I'm curious, what is the most important idea or theme you plan to emphasize in your presentation this evening?

Dukes: I think, probably what I would say, right now, the most important theme would be the need for us to have a capacity to bring people together, to solve challenging problems, and the fact that we currently have a state of public speech that often doesn't encourage that. How can we transform that situation? How can we make it so that we're more effective at bringing people together to solve community problems?

I'm going to ask the audience, what is bad public speech and what is good public speech? I don't think we often think about that; many of us do think that, well, this is terrible, we have politicians lying, we have talk radio where people are yelling at each other, and it's very hard to get people in elected office to be able to work together particularly at the national level. I really want to bring it down to the sort of ordinary level of, what do you want, what do people themselves think makes for effective public conversation? That's where we want to end up. Bad public speech, causes harm; but, good public speech [can do the opposite], what do they mean by good public speech, how do they create that speech? Then, to use the example of a community in far southwestern Virginia in the Appalachian coal fields, where there have been lots of issues, they've had a power plant that was built there, that was highly controversial and highly conflictual, they've got some mountaintop mining that's being done there, and certainly lots of surface coal mining that brings jobs and other sorts of benefits, but that some people have been saying has been either overly destructive or saying that their role is decreasing, since the area no longer has as much coal. Even if we're supporters of coal mining, we need to figure out our economic future and can we do so in ways that we

maintain who we are, what's most important about us as a community, our culture, our heritage, how we continue to provide for economics, without denying or without getting rid of what makes us unique, what we love, why we want to be here, and that includes natural resources as well?

Erwin: What does your personal leadership journey look like?

Dukes: If I can go, back, some people are surprised to learn I started my university education at the United States Air Force Academy. Leadership was a key element at the Air Force Academy. I spent two years there and took many hours of leadership classes. I'm not sure that I remember the specifics of that, except that people might be surprised, if you're not in the military, to think that it's not all about authority and all that. In fact, it's about how can you motivate people to perform? How can you solve problems by bringing different people's ideas into the mix, to be able to do so creative creatively and productively as well? That was a first part of my leadership journey, then I don't think I had much leadership. I took time off to start a family, focus on music, I had a piano business, I was kind of back to the land, feeling as I was seeing things going on in my community that I really would like to take more of a leadership role in, but I didn't know how.

I eventually found my way through this idea of conflict resolution and mediation, starting with community mediation, which is people saying that within our community we have individuals that can be leaders at solving the conflicts that are harming us in the community. When we have neighborhood, landlord tenant, or even divorcing family issues, that we don't necessarily need to abdicate leadership to the people that are experts, even though those can be helpful in some circumstances. [Communities can chart their own course] if they follow a particular process that allows people to learn from each other about their choices, their options, and what's bothering them, then figure out for themselves which are the best choices for them together that are going to work for their situations. That's a process that can be done by people volunteering in the community; that's a different type of leadership some people call facilitative leadership. We're not inserting our views into how you solve the problem, but we are very much asserting our own views and structuring a process that's going to be successful for community people to do that.

Then after that, my journey took me to graduate school to figure out how to

make this happen and how to learn the psychology, sociology, anthropology and legal aspects of conflict. I then worked my way into my current position, which is that I work with groups around Virginia, and outside of Virginia as well, that have some sort of conflict issues and help them figure out for themselves what the best solutions are to their problem? It's very much a journey for me that's ended up with a focus primarily on facilitative leadership.

Erwin: Could you share a formative experience or moment, in regard to your facilitative leadership?

Dukes: I can think of quite a few times, when I'm tempted to interject my own opinion into something. It doesn't mean that I don't have an opinion or that there aren't issues where I can act on that opinion, too. So, my kids are in the school system, I'm an advocate for them doing well in the schools, and I might see some changes I need to make, and so forth. Within my professional role, there are plenty of times when I think that I can see a way out of the matter at issue, but somebody will surprise me with an answer that might be more creative, certainly more tailored to their situation and it's going to be suitable for them.

I can think of a great example of leadership, collaborative leadership. Many people might be familiar with the Tobacco Revitalization and Indemnification Commission, which is pouring literally hundreds of millions of dollars into economic development into Southside and southwestern Virginia. And very few people know that the money that came from the national lawsuit settlement that the States' Attorneys Generals had against the tobacco companies. The tobacco companies monies were apportioned to each state. I was working with a group of tobacco farmers and public health advocates who had been talking about whether they had any common ground. They've found some common ground, that the health advocates did not want to see harm done to tobacco communities. They realized they need to have a strong economy in order for there to be good education systems, in order for people to be able to have healthy families, to be able get medical care, and so they didn't want to see that disappear.

On the other hand, they did see that there's harm done by tobacco products. The tobacco farmers themselves were learning more about the tobacco control people and said, well, they don't sound like they really want to put

us out of business tomorrow, they'd be happy if we went away, but it sounds like they are interested in us. We developed a relationship with these folks. When the settlement came, I got a call from some of the farmers, who said, we want to see if we can meet with the public health advocates and see if we might be able to come up with a way that we can get some of that money. There was going to be, the estimate was at the time, there would be about \$4.2 billion coming into Virginia over a period of 25 years, quite a bit of money. We helped facilitate that conversation and they held a meeting in a little cabin along the Roanoke River owned by one of the state delegates. We had some of the farmers that had been active in the initial dialogue and some of the public health people. They sat down and they figured out what they would do. They would agree to go after half of the money. The farmers would get 40 percent that would help them transition their livelihoods, and help to indemnify them for the loss of value, as we've seen tobacco becoming less and less valuable as a market within the United States. [This has occurred] as companies are going overseas and the demand for tobacco decreases as smoking decreases within the United States. The public health community said, "we'd like to have 10 percent of the money obtained to help us get rid of the very high incidence of youth smoking tobacco," and the farmers agreed that youths shouldn't be smoking tobacco, it should be an adult choice.

My own view could have been, well wait a minute there's 40 percent going to the farmers and 10 percent going to the health advocates, is that really going to be equitable, but I had to trust that we had the right people at the table, it wasn't just one organization; there were several organizations represented. And I realized what they said, later, was there had never been any funding in Virginia, public funding, for tobacco control from the state. This would be a major effort for the health advocates and that they also felt that there was a real need. It wasn't as though they saw this going to something that was not going to be useful, they saw that 40 percent going to the farmers as something that would help those communities adjust to the transition that was going on economically, those are going to be healthier communities if they have healthier economies, as well. That's an example for me, of not substituting my own judgment in saying something like, well, wait should this be more like 50-50 for that, and they were highly successful. They ended up with the farm community getting 50 percent of the funding and that largely went to what's now the Tobacco Indemnification Revitalization Commission. Then money that went into what was called, at the time, The Tobacco

Settlement Foundation, and now I think it's called the Virginia Health Care Foundation, became available for reducing the youth use of tobacco, as well. That is an example of where, if I had inserted my own point of view, I might have created an argument that didn't belong there at all.

Erwin: Did your leadership approach evolve into a more collaborative leadership style or facilitative leadership style?

Dukes: I think, first of all, learning about mediation, the idea that there is a third party who does not take a position on particular issues [was important to me as I developed as a leader]. I didn't know that that was the case, I'd never heard of that before, and it was particularly attractive to me. I am somebody who can easily see the various sides of an issue. It's been harder for me to do the converse, to be able to say when there is something that's really not appropriate. For instance, in a public conversation where somebody is bullying somebody else, not to just be able to say, well my role isn't to stop that, I'm just supposed to be neutral. Well, neutrality doesn't mean that you don't take steps to make a conversation productive, to make it fair, or to make it something that everybody can participate equally in.

For me, it's been harder to make that adjustment to be an advocate for that type of process. I fall more naturally into that sort of, let's let everybody be and get their perspectives out and figure out a way to solve their problems. I would say, yes, I needed to learn the mediation role, but I was very comfortable in that role and for me it's more realizing that doesn't just mean letting people do what they want to do. It means you have to be a really strong advocate for that process.

Erwin: We often hear about or confront seemingly intractable differences that divide people in communities, which I'm sure you deal with a lot. How have you tried to bridge those differences in your work?

Dukes: The term intractable is both a term of art—we hear people say intractable—and a challenge to me, because I've had many circumstances where people say, well, there's never going to be an agreement, there's no point in talking about it. Really, within the tobacco community project itself, we had so many very senior members feeling very frustrated, after meeting, and said there is no common ground. I started thinking about that, and think, that's true. You don't just find common ground, like it's just lying there. It's

like agriculture, you have to prepare the soil, you have to make it more fertile. Common ground isn't just found there, it has to be something that develops and it is possible to do that. Somebody might say we can't possibly grow rye here, because there's a forest, there's woods here, right? Of course, you can't do that. You've got to take care of the woods, you've got to make sure you've got the right soil, you've got to see whether you've got the right nutrients.

It's the same thing for what people might term intractable issues. For a lot of the intractable issues, have they ever given a significant effort to figure out ways to get the right parties to the table, under the right circumstances and with the right knowledge to be able to work on those issues? I realize that is not the case in all circumstances, and that there are certainly situations where there is violence or there are significant power disparities, and that those need to be addressed before people can work together effectively. I think myself, and my media colleagues are not at all naïve, we work in the realm of power and we realize that there are many different forms of power, but the intractability of something, I see that more as a challenge. Most people did say there was no point in the farmers sitting down with the health advocates. The health advocates were likewise criticized for sitting down with the farmers. Both sides got criticized. The example that I gave of the money—that they were able to successfully lobby for together, they were able to work together to make that happen—is just one example of a number of successful outcomes that they had. There were other circumstances, too, for environmental issues where I've seen the same thing. Intractable, means that there are significant differences, but it does not mean that those differences cannot be overcome. Right now, I just see that as a challenge, I don't see that as something you would accept that it is intractable. [Perhaps better to think of it as] intractable to date maybe.

Erwin: Along the same lines, forming authentic relationships is also really important in conflict resolution and mediation. What has been your approach to relationship building?

Dukes: For people that work in mediation, I'd say there are two almost paradoxical needs. One is for people to be able to negotiate agreements when they don't have a good relationship. We're not going to get people to either like each other or to feel like the other person has some validity to their perspective, but nonetheless they may still need to have some sort of decision they make together. A divorcing couple with children is often a

great example. They have to be parents to their children for the rest of their life, that's going to happen. And a lot of times that happens in cases where both of them are playing an active role in that. Even if they don't have a good relationship, they have to be able to negotiate effectively. A mediator can help that happen by being very detailed about asking, "What are your expectations, how do you meet those expectations, what happens when that expectation is not met?" How do you deal with those problems, being very definitive about what sort of steps the people are able to agree to and then making sure that those agreements can be enforced? Same thing within the environmental arena that I work in. You don't necessarily need to rely on the parties to enforce agreements. It's much easier though, I'd say more common, for the work that we have, for people to begin with a relationship that is either fractured or doesn't exist. Just again, with the tobacco issue, those two groups didn't have a relationship and the only communication happened in the news media or perhaps with the companies telling the farmers about what the public health advocates were intending to do. They didn't have a relationship that had even been fractured. I would say that work, and a lot of other work, is made much easier when people are able to talk with each other, and able to take actions where they are starting to build a level of trust. It's going to sound like that's the only work I did, but I'm going to stick with that theme, because I have a good example of that. We had a session where a farmer was talking in front of a group of health advocates and was very angry, very nervous, and pretty much railed against them for threatening his livelihood, his family's future and his farm.

Afterwards some people came up and said that's what we wanted, we didn't want you to sugarcoat it, we wanted you to say what you really believed. We don't want to make nice. We want to know what the differences are here. A few months later I was at another meeting, a smaller group with that same farmer and some of the same representatives. He said, "I want to tell you all something, I thought you were there to trap me, I thought I was going to see something in the newspaper or be attacked on the floor and it was the opposite. I have to say that that was really significant for me." That same farmer, a couple of years later, was being lobbied heavily to abandon the agreement to split the money that I talked about earlier. He said, "No, we've got an agreement with these folks and I'm not going to go back out on my word to these people." I think that type of commitment came because he had developed that relationship of trust with the tobacco control advocates.

Erwin: How does your vision of social change in progress interact with the collective individual visions of those with whom you work?

Dukes: We certainly don't have a conversation about their view of social change. I think we often are working with people who are very strong advocates for their views, and they see something that they either want to protect and keep or they see something that they want to change. Oftentimes the environmentalists are the ones with such strong views. They can be on either side, when there's a particular policy that's protecting an area. Let's say a national park or a forest wilderness area: They want to keep it that way or see something that they think harm is being done to, they want to change that situation as well. I'm using environmentalists as an example, but it can be people working within industry, or even within government. They have very strong views. Their view tends to be, we need to advocate as loudly and with as many numbers as possible in order to make sure that we can overwhelm the opposition. That's just a classic community organizing effort, and oftentimes that's what's needed, and oftentimes people behave this way because they're successful when doing so.

What is more challenging is when they're working with some of their own allies and they have differences. That method of dealing with disputes by being louder and more numerous doesn't work when you have people that have similar tactics or when they're working on issues where there isn't a very clear right or wrong, which is most of the time. There's not really one right and one wrong then. My view of change is that change happens when you have people develop a different understanding of the problem and make commitments based on that understanding of the problem and the meaning of that problem to other people; they make the commitments to change their own behavior because of that, and the only way I see that happening is if people learn what is important to those other people and learn why that's important to them. Then they will be willing to do that.

Let me give an example, and I seem to be stuck on tobacco! We had a lot of meetings with farmers, health advocates, and people also involved in economic development, and at one point we decided what we needed to do was to have some circle conversations. By circle conversations, we mean we would bring to the middle of the room people that had likeminded interests. All the tobacco farmers sitting down in a circle in the middle of a much larger circle, where they're surrounded by people that have different

perspectives on the outside, then do that with the health advocates, and then maybe do that with people that had regulatory responsibility or were with public agencies. This would alternate. In this case we did it with three groups. One group was just tobacco farmers. One group was just people involved with tobacco control for public health. And then, one group was composed of people whose public responsibility meant that they were not advocates for either position, so they might be working for the U.S.D.A., for cooperate extension or other state or federal organizations that had some sort of related regulatory or educational responsibility. The stories that came out were powerful stories that people had, as opposed to stories about, for example, “I think we should have fewer people smoking,” or “I think we need to be able to continue to market our products fairly,” whatever the case might be. It becomes, “My child came up to me and asked me as a tobacco farmer, Daddy, will we be homeless, because the concern is that we will no longer be able to produce the crop that is providing the family’s income.” On the other side, the story was, “I’m involved with this work because my aunt had lung cancer, my father had lung cancer, and I’ve seen the harm that’s done from smoking and I think we need to stop it, you know, we need to make that stop.”

Those types of stories then help create a different type of understanding, in which people don’t necessarily give up the fact that they need to do something. They have a broader understanding: seems that they’ve said, “All right, well now my problem is not only how do I keep farming, but also how do I keep farming and how do I keep youth from starting to use tobacco, becoming addicted, and having these health problems?” For the public health advocates, it’s now not just, how do I get people to stop smoking, but how do I make sure that these communities, which will be harmed if they just immediately stopped producing tobacco—they could experience widespread mental health problems, all the problems associated with the poor economy—how can I help stop the smoking, but also how can I help these communities become strong again economically as well?

For me then, my model of change has helped them. That becomes their model of change, too, which is, “We are bringing people in and expanding our view of what we need to do; we’re also expanding our capabilities because we have a broader set of interests here.” As I already mentioned, for instance, they were able to go together to the Virginia legislature and get the funding

together for the money that was going to benefit both communities for that. My vision of change is much more of the power of people being able to work collectively as opposed to power people being able to work individually.

Erwin: How do you work with communities that have a collective and democratic vision?

Dukes: Let's switch to the Clinch River Valley Initiative. Let me say, I think the operative word is help. This is them doing it themselves. We have the privilege of being able to be at a public university where service is part of our mission and being able to help people work together. The Clinch River Valley Initiative is a project that is not owned by anybody. It's not a nonprofit by itself, and there's no one body that says, well, we are the ones that are running it. My institute, the Institute for Environmental Negotiation, typically facilitates most of the meetings for the Initiative and we have some grants that allow us to write the meeting summaries. We can operate a website for those involved, too, but there's lots of activity that occurs outside of the work that we do, as well. That's an example where there were people in far Southwest Virginia who felt they needed to have a forum that would bring individuals together to focus on the question of, how can we take our enormous assets, our cultural assets, our historical assets, but also our environmental assets, in this case the Clinch River, in particular, which is a world class asset for biodiversity, to have a conversation that doesn't involve just the environment or just economics, but one that says instead that can we both grow our economy and protect our environment, enhance our environment, and keep our image of who we are as a community too?

We probably have 150 people, or maybe even more that have attended the meetings, with from 40 to maybe 65 people at a time that will come to meetings. It's evolved into five different work groups that are working. That began really with just an initial meeting of a diverse group of people saying, what's important to you, what would you like to see happen? And eventually, about our fourth meeting, somebody said, "You know, we really should have a vision that's going to guide us for that." The vision came after people had said, "There's a problem, we've got a change in our economy, coal is not as important as it used to be, it's going to continue to decline somewhat, we need to find ways to improve our economy to retain our youth, to be able to provide for public services like education and health, and do so in ways that don't destroy our character." They would say, "We don't want to

be Dollywood (an amusement park in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee in the Smoky Mountains in Central Appalachia). We want to be the real thing. We have the real Appalachian heritage here.”

After people discussed that over some period of time and saw that they had common ground, environmentalists, economic development people, people from the universities, people from local governments, state agencies and people from the business community were saying, “Let’s create a vision.” It was after about a year of meetings that we did an exercise where people identified clearly what they really had been talking about and what was important to them about it. Unfortunately, I don’t have that vision statement memorized, but it basically suggests that the Clinch River Valley will be a world class attraction because “We’ve been able to protect the natural environment, we’ve been able to protect our cultural and natural resources; but we’ve also been able to protect our people here to provide jobs for them, and done so in a way that is a model for others.” That’s a long-winded answer, but much shorter than the reality of how long and how much work it took to get to that point.

Morikawa: How did you get the different groups to come together at the beginning?

Dukes: For the Clinch River Valley Initiative? We run a Leadership Institute, which is a partnership program founded by Michael Ellerbrock of Virginia Tech, all credit to Mike and Virginia Tech, and we have partners at other state agencies. We take people around the state. Every year we’ve been taking people to far southwestern Virginia looking at coal mining issues, taking people to a coal mine, and hearing people say, there are fights over coal mining, concerning surface mining, mountaintop mining and so forth. But there’s also pretty much agreement that, the people just look at the numbers, they know there aren’t nearly as many people employed in coal as there used to be. Coal is a finite resource, even though companies continue to be creative in finding ways to mine it; we know that we’re going to be getting less coal, at least at some point in the future and that future is not terribly far away. There are concerns on the impact on the environment and health for people if we continue to rely on coal as well. We would hear these arguments when we would come down every year.

About three years ago, we decided to put together a panel, not just for people

individually, but a panel to talk about these issues. We had people from Dominion Power; people from Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, which is fighting mountaintop removal; people from Appalachian Voices, which is an environmental group really active against mountaintop removal and for the improvement of water quality; people from economic development offices and from state government. Each of these representatives participated in a panel for our Leadership Institute with Virginia Tech. We asked them not to debate each other, but to say why the issue of coal was important to them. We asked, “What does it really mean to you?” They ended up having a really good conversation with each other despite their fears that they would not. There was quite a bit of nervousness among all of the participants: “Are we being set up, what’s going to happen, who are these people that we’re going to be talking in front of?” People normally just don’t talk like we had asked them to speak in front of groups. And at lunch afterwards one of the participants told me, “We should be talking like this every month, we should be getting together, because we have a lot of common ground.” Everybody agreed, and we said in response, “What can we do to help?” The group didn’t meet the next month, nor the next year, but it did meet, it took us about 14 or 15 months.

What we did during that time was have lots of telephone conversations and we came back to visit a couple more times in person with people. We asked people, if you were interested in pulling people together to examine the region’s economy—knowing, of course, that there are people that are doing this because that is their job; they are economic development people—how would you do it in a way that starts to engage people that haven’t been part of that conversation before? How would you do that and who would you involve with that? After doing that we felt we’d heard enough to say, let’s bring people together, share what we’ve learned and see what people may want to do to move forward after they consider what we have shared.

We’ve done this in a number of other circumstances, too. We had a meeting almost three years ago, September 28, 2010, at UVA (University of Virginia) Wise. UVA Wise is right in the middle of coal country; we had about 65 people come who were either intrigued enough or worried enough that something was going to happen that maybe they wanted to stop, that they better pay attention to, we had some presentations from them. We brought them together, we had some presentations and then we had an open

discussion. We asked: “What do people think they need to have happen? Would they be interested in us? What we do is help people solve problems together, we bring people together, we facilitate them.” They said, “This is really good because we do a lot of collaboration, but we don’t do it with as wide a group. All the economic development people get together, or all the educators get together, and there’s a lot of collaboration, or they get together with the legislators and they get agreement on legislative priorities. They really haven’t done it with as diverse a group as this one.” That initial gathering was the result of lots and lots of interviews and discussions and asking people what’s important to them and what they would like to see happen. We told them that we didn’t have an agenda that needs to occur. We’re interested in working with you if you think it’s important, but we don’t have to do that if you do not want it.

Our work does not involve pushing people towards a particular direction. Our work is involved with resolving conflict and developing consensus for communities to make decisions for themselves. There is very good collaborative capacity in the Central Appalachian region and people kind of took this idea and ran with it. For the past three years, about every three months, we have had a large meeting, and then smaller action groups have developed that meet much more frequently than that. The larger group has decided the priorities that would guide these smaller ones. They created a vision; they said the way we’re going to address the need for a changed economy is to create a state park, we’re going to revitalize our downtowns, we’re going to create more access points to the river so that, not only can citizens take advantage of it, but we can open it up for entrepreneurs to develop outdoor recreation businesses. And we’re going to improve the Clinch River and area’s water quality, not just maintain it, but improve it.

The group tied this vision to really developing a higher level of environmental education around the region. What that’s become is they’d like to have an environmental hub, an ecological center that would be more of a hub that people can come to, kind of like Heartwood [in Abingdon, Virginia] is now. I don’t know if you are familiar with Heartwood, but it’s a beautiful building that is a hub for arts and crafts activities in southwest Virginia. It’s a gateway. Visitors come in, they can see the names of all the people and the location of their shops who have items for sale and they can go there if they wish. They want to develop an education center the same way.

We play a facilitative role in that. I have a wonderful partner there, Christine Gyovai, who is the project lead from the area. She and I co-facilitate the meetings. We have had a number of graduate students over the years that have worked with us. This is a great experience for them to be able to get some hands-on experience. It's also a good resource for the people from the communities that are participating in this; they don't have to be bothered by thinking about who's taking notes, how's the meeting going to be structured, who to get to run the meeting. There's a steering committee. We don't just develop the agenda alone. We ask them what's important to talk about. We are providing the support services for them to do that.

Morikawa: I noticed that you said that there is not a nonprofit that's been formed to manage the effort, right?

Dukes: Right. Participants love the idea that no one group has ownership of it. If it becomes some agency's project, then it becomes that agency's project. They did say they would like to do it (establish a nonprofit), but there's no time frame for that.

Morikawa: Do you have an opinion about that?

Dukes: My opinion is that the group knows best. I will say, since I am free to share it in this forum, that facilitated doesn't mean we just ignore what's going on or we just say, all right, you've decided that. I raise questions with them. What are the consequences of not incorporating? Is this going to be able to continue? If you do incorporate, are you going to have people who drop off, because there might not be leadership? Everybody, right now, sees that they have to step up to the plate. Our role is to make sure that they are thinking through those questions. My opinion is yes, any decision you need to make should be a well-informed decision and theirs, so far, has been a well-informed decision.

Erwin: Can you speak more to the university's role in conflict resolution?

Dukes: I am really excited about this. There's an organization called the University Network for Collaborative Governance. I'm not excited about that term, but collaborative governance is just a fancy way of saying, bringing people together to solve problems. There are a number of universities doing similar work to what we're doing around the country and outside of the country, enough of us that we've created this network. We meet annually

and have discussions about ways of being effective. Of course, Virginia Tech is a Cooperative Extension university; public service is an enormous part of its mission, everybody knows that. People know there are smaller schools and private schools, too, where they see service as a part of their mission. I think particularly useful in situations of conflict, or let's say of difference, is the fact that universities have a certain legitimacy as not having something specifically at stake in the outcome of an issue, and that people tend to look at them for knowledge leadership and that part of knowledge leadership is knowing how to help people solve problems. I think we've benefited from that, being at the University of Virginia. I think other people have benefited, as well, from being at a university. It's also a responsibility that we have to help solve problems. I think, also, universities are wonderful places, you have a lot of people who have lots of talent.

This idea of bringing people to a university, and I know this happens at Virginia Tech, at other universities, and schools, too, you have conferences and symposia, but there will be times when you might be hosting a group that is having some difficult challenges, and they can have an effective conversation with each other that's informed by the knowledge that is in the room because it is a university. I would love to see universities do more work as conveners. There certainly are circumstances, not taking over issues, but saying to participants that we've heard them, that there's a question of poverty in this particular region or that there's an issue that has to do with concerns about a certain type of educational system. We say, "We're willing to offer some of our support in exchange for the learning that can occur for our students and for our faculty. We think this would be a beneficial sort of exchange. What we can do is help you, we can host you, we can put you in contact with people who have considerable knowledge about these issues. We can get you away from the sort of hubbub, for instance, with the state level people in Richmond, where you see people fighting about the same problems, over and over again. Let's get away from that. Let's get in a setting that you're supposed to be thinking about problems in a different way." I'm really big on universities being able to serve as incubators of problem solving. There is a network now, the University Network for Collaborative Governance, it's helping schools learn how to do that better.

Erwin: I have one more question. What do you see as the capacities among

individuals, groups and communities for creative and democratic dialogue for problem solving?

Dukes: First let me say, I think there's a big need for that. Our democracy, every democracy, every society, whether a democracy or not, needs to have everybody involved in that. This idea that when you can bring people together in the right circumstances—in the wrong circumstances people are just asked to come to meetings, there might be 1,000 people there, and each is given two minutes to say their piece and you don't get anything done—where people know they're going to be listened to, where they know that they can ask questions and get good answers or if they don't have good answers, they can figure out how to get good answers together, where they know that there's not somebody working behind the scenes to manipulate the process or defeat them. Then we put our creative hats on and create things that people couldn't have imagined before. I've seen that happen over and over again.

Our democracy needs to have that capacity, every community needs to have that capacity to be able to make use of its residents' talents. Certainly, this region has, with the university, history, business connections and the numbers of social service agencies, other nonprofits, this is a fertile ground for creativity. If we can figure out how to channel that constructively into solving problems instead of fighting each other over issues, that will be something that we really need to do. I don't want to leave you the impression that it doesn't mean fighting, it doesn't mean conflict. It means possibly more conflict in the sense of more understanding that there are diverse views and different views that people have, but not the sort of conflict that you so see with name-calling, slandering and people walking out of the room. Conflict in the sense where people really do understand why they had these differences. Only then can you begin to figure out ways to transcend those differences.

Erwin: How do you promote those capacities?

Dukes: I'm glad you asked that question. We have something called the Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute. It's a partner organization. Michael Ellerbrock (Extension and Professor, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics) of Virginia Tech, founded that, and we started that in order to bring this capacity to more and more communities. We've had more

than 300 graduates of that program, that have gone through the succession, three-day sessions, nine-month program with work in between, not because they'll become mediators, but because they're going to become principal leaders and conveners in their own communities. They've done that over and over again. They've done far more work than my Institute has ever been able to do. We've seen people all over the state and outside of the state; they've learned and gained confidence in their ability to bring people together, that they've done some really amazing daring and productive work, reaching out to people who might have previously have been thought of as enemies and brought them together to deal with their differences. That's our answer to that. We also write, do some research and teach in our program in urban environmental planning, and do things like this, speak to other organizations and at other universities. I want to say, too, I do more work with Virginia Tech faculty than I do with UVA Faculty, not because I don't want to work with UVA faculty, but because there are more Virginia Tech faculty out there in communities around the state working on real world problems. They're interested in, knowledgeable and competent in this working together collaboratively.

Chapter 4: Amy Goldstein

Amy Goldstein, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist at *The Washington Post* and author of *Janesville, An American Story*.

Date of Interview: February 19, 2018

Interviewers: Andy Morikawa, Vanessa Guerra, Neda Moayerian, Mary Ryan

Vanessa Guerra: Amy, what led you to select Janesville as the community on which to focus?

Amy Goldstein: Well, I wanted to take a close-up of what really happened from the ground level view when jobs go away. I thought that we pretty much knew as a country how bad the job numbers were during the Great Recession and afterwards. I wanted to explore what losing work, good working-class work, means for individuals and the texture of a community. And I wanted to find a community to write about that had, up until this point had enjoyed a very long healthy economic history. Janesville had what at the time was the oldest operating General Motors plant in the country. It had started making tractors just after World War One and started making Chevys a couple years after that. So it really had been the economic backbone of this community for generations. And suddenly it was gone. And I thought that was an interesting place to try to explore, what does it mean when work goes away that people had thought would last their whole working lives.

Mary Ryan: How did you choose the cases or families?

Goldstein: I wanted this story to be told kind of like a kaleidoscope, so that readers would see how events unfolded and how they affected people and how people responded from many different vantage points. So I have three main families that lost work who are running through about a five-year chronology that my story tells. And I also wanted to understand the perspectives of some of the central people in town who were trying to figure out what to do to help those people in town who had lost work. So, there was the main banker in town who co-founded a new regional economic development coalition. The head of the local job center, which was kind of ground zero where people arrived shell-shocked when their work had gone

away to try to figure out what to do next. One of the characters in the story is a social worker who works with a growing crop of homeless teenagers and is trying to help raise money to create housing for them. So these are some of the people who populate the story and show both what it's like firsthand to lose work and how this community responded when all that work went away.

Guerra: What was the most difficult or unexpected aspect of your research process?

Goldstein: Well, I had been a reporter for a few decades when I began to do this work, so the reporting itself wasn't all that different from reporting that I do from my job at *The Washington Post*. It wasn't that different in kind. It was very different in quantity. This was something I worked on for nearly six years by the time this book came out, and it was really a process of forming relationships in a community that wasn't my community and sustaining them. Even so, that wasn't that different from the rest of my work. What was most different was learning to write this book as a narrative and a chronology based on the experiences of these characters who rotate in and out of the story across the pages.

Guerra: Based on all the time that you were able to spend in the community, what are the implications for families and individuals of the stress being placed on social supports by the continuous ideological assault on public service production?

Goldstein: Losing work itself is an intrinsically really stressful experience. That's one of the things I learned very quickly, that people's identity is very wrapped up in this work. This is the kind of work, these are jobs that many, many people in town had held over generations, so people's extended families were doing the same kind of work. There were people I write about who lost their work in their 30s or early 40s, when their fathers had retired with good pensions, and they knew that they weren't going to be able to hold their jobs long enough to have that kind of security when they got a little bit older. So it's a very stressful time. Another thing that I learned is that all kinds of social programs exist, some governmental. For people who are having hard economic times, there are food stamps and there is Medicaid and there are welfare benefits. One of the things that I discovered, which I think is a very important thing, is that falling out of the middle class is very

different than having been poor all along. And one way that it's different is, not to generalize, but many people who have formerly been middle class are very reluctant to ask for help outside their own family. It's not how they see themselves. It feels like an admission of defeat. It's relying on a source of help that people never imagined they would need to turn to, and that's not to say that nobody did it, but it's a psychologically very hard thing to do.

Ryan: I'm wondering if you can speak more directly to how you navigate emotion and affect in your research.

Goldstein: What I really wanted to understand was, what was the kind of interior experience of people as they lost work and as they made choices about what to do afterwards? So, I did ask them questions about their state of mind, their state of emotion, in addition to doing a lot of in-depth conversation with people over a period of years. As part of the research for this book, I also did a survey just of the county in which Janesville is located. I did it in collaboration with people at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where I had an appointment for a little while, while I was working on this book. And one of the things that we asked about in that survey was, if you or someone in your home has lost a job, have you had then a whole set of experiences? One of the questions was, did you lose sleep during this time? More than half the people said yes. Did you tend to avoid social situations? A high percentage of people said yes. Are you finding that you're arguing more with friends and family? More than half the people said yes. The question that really broke my heart when I saw the response was asking people whether they felt embarrassed or ashamed that they had lost work, and more than half the people said yes. That was just such a powerful finding, I thought, because it says that even when you're losing work in a community where so many other people are losing exactly the same kind of work at the same time that you are, it's a really hard thing psychologically for people to contend with.

Ryan: What has been the pattern of wages and earnings in Janesville?

Goldstein: Let me talk a little bit about unemployment in addition to wages. This General Motors assembly plant mostly closed down two days before Christmas of 2008, and there were a number of supplier companies that had made goods or provided services to the plant that closed around the same time or a few months afterwards, so that by early spring of 2009,

unemployment in that county and in Wisconsin was up to more than 13 percent. That's really high. Now it's down to about 4 percent, so the number of people who are outright flat out of work has come way down, but if you ask what kind of work people are doing and what are people earning, it's also way down. The General Motors plant was paying most people \$20 an hour towards the end. Now, if you find a job that pays \$14, \$15, \$16 an hour, you're doing pretty well. And while jobs have come back, the number of industrial jobs in the area is still way down from what it was before the recession.

Guerra: What are the aspects that you found contributed to the resiliency of the community once the G.M. plant left?

Goldstein: I didn't know what I would find in Janesville when I started making visits there, and it turns out that Janesville is a very resilient place. It has a long tradition of philanthropy, kind of homegrown philanthropy. So there are lots of fundraisers that are intended to help a whole cadre of local nonprofits. So when all of this work went away, there were big efforts by these nonprofits to try to help people. The main food pantry in town, called Echo, had been around since the 1960s. There is one free health clinic downtown for people who don't have insurance and don't have much money. These places saw a huge influx of new clients. In fact, at the food pantry, there were people who used to be donors who were now showing up in line in the morning to get food. But even though this place is trying as much as any place has tried, I mean, in particular a few years ago when the economy was still terrible there, it's hard to generate enough help when the number of people working is down and the number of people needing help is way up. So, the food pantry, for instance, for years after all these jobs went away, had to limit how many people they could serve. They would take the first 40 people in line when the door opened at 9 in the morning, which meant that people were arriving way early in the morning to get in line, and I spent a lot of mornings there waiting to see who number 41 would be.

Ryan: How do you see the interaction of race and gender in the different groups that you examined in your research?

Goldstein: Well, Janesville is not a hugely racially diverse place. There's a town called Beloit, the next town south in the county, that's always had more diversity and has a pretty big African-American population, which it has had since the early 20th century. Janesville is not that place. It's a predominately

white place. It's a little bit less white than it used to be, so the issues of race were not that prevalent in Janesville itself, just because of its population. In terms of gender, there were women who lost those factory jobs as well as men. There were women who went back to school to try to retrain as well as men. So, even though I was interested in the question of gender differentials, I didn't find that many.

Ryan: Have you seen any difference in your analysis of people who were poor all along in Janesville versus people who were directly affected by the plant closing? Did that affect how people of different genders, perhaps, might have navigated that experience?

Goldstein: Let me answer something related to, but slightly different from what you just asked. What I found was that there were many people who had these good-paying factory jobs who started grabbing any job they could find, whether it was at a gas station, at a convenience store, so that the people in town who'd just been clinging to the bottom rungs of the working class were bouncing down into poverty, because the jobs that they previously would have taken were now being taken by people who never would have thought to take those jobs previously. So it's kind of a domino effect. And that's the class difference I was seeing.

Guerra: What is you're thinking about workforce development programs, which largely failed in Janesville?

Goldstein: I did find that a local technical college called Blackhawk Technical College tried about as hard as any such school could try to assist and retrain dislocated workers, which is a fancy term for people who've lost their jobs and whose past form of work is not likely to come back. Thousands of people who were factory workers went back to school. It's very hard to train dislocated workers, and some people fared well, and a lot of people didn't fare well. Now, I don't think that that is an indictment of workforce training in general. I think it's very particular to whether there are jobs around for people to get at the end of their retraining; whether the economy is in good shape or bad shape. So, this was a very hard thing to make work well for everybody in Janesville, but again I think it depends on where you are.

Guerra: What do you hope people will learn from the story of Janesville?

Goldstein: As I said at the beginning, I really wanted to show close up what

it's like to lose work and to try to figure out what to do next, because people have to figure out something, and the choices aren't always very good. I wanted to show how hard that experience is, that some people prevail, some people don't prevail. Afterwards, I also was interested in what this big economic cataclysm in the local economy does to the texture of a community that had been for a long time a pretty, if not unified, at least "get along" kind of a place. There are always Democrats and Republicans. Janesville is a big union town, so many people there are Democratic-leaning, and one of the things that I found there is that, as has been true in the country as a whole, this kind of economic trauma really produced some political schisms in town. Debates over what should be done to try to rebuild the economy, whether to hold out for the plant to reopen, which is what many of the former workers and Democrats and union folks were advocating, versus people who were more in the business community and Republican political leaders who were saying, no, that time is gone and we need to just move on, which is a pretty hard thing for some of the people who had been the workers to hear. So, there were schisms that emerged in political outlook that intensified over the years that I was writing. I think there are personal effects, community effects, economic effects, political effects and that's some of what I'm hoping people get out of the story.

Guerra: Taking into account that the G.M. plant itself was a big part of the community identity, how did you see the identity of the community evolve during all of this process?

Goldstein: I think that, at least up until now, the union identity and the General Motors identity have lingered longer than the jobs. There are still people who held those jobs who feel aligned with what life used to be there. Now I think the interesting question is, what's going to happen a generation from now? Will people have those memories?

Ryan: To follow up on this, in your research in Janesville, was there a particular effective combination of community groups that seemed better at healing the community, or was there a particular combination of corporate and government actors and neighborhoods that worked well together?

Goldstein: There were a few different kinds of alliances that formed very quickly as these jobs were going away. In some cases, these formed when it had been announced that the jobs were going away and it hadn't even

happened yet. So, one of the people in the story, a man named Bob Orman, was running the local job center. The fall before, a couple of months before the jobs ended, he started pulling together a lot of nonprofits in the community to try to plan what kind of assistance folks would need and to make sure that scarce resources weren't being wasted by people duplicating efforts. So it was an alliance that included, for instance, the public library because he figured that maybe there would need to be some literacy training. People who were doing mental health work, people who were doing health care work, people who were running the main food pantry, Goodwill, you know, places where people could get used clothes and other stuff. And this group kept meeting for several years to try to keep thinking through what does this community need? You know, that was completely home grown. It was a grassroots effort. It doesn't mean that all the needs of people were met, but it did mean that there was a lot of thought going into what could be done.

Similarly, the business community and the county's economic development division formed a new regional alliance. Janesville and Beloit, even though they are about 20 minutes apart and they're in the same county, have been rivals for a long time, in part because some industry had disappeared much earlier in Beloit, and Janesville felt kind of economically superior, legitimately. Now both towns were in the same economic straits. So, the business leadership of both communities got together and formed something called Rock County 5.0, which was a five-year plan to try to bring new businesses to town and to persuade small businesses to stay, even though many of them were losing customers. And just to try to create a kind of good narrative about this area that wasn't just a story about this historic auto plant having left. That was a regional effort. That kind of work also is very hard to do. A few companies have come into the area. As I said, they're not paying anything like what the old jobs used to pay. But there's been a big concerted push to think through how to try to restore the local economy.

Guerra: How do you translate people's opinion about unions now?

Goldstein: In Janesville, as is true in much of the country, union membership has been declining. The jobs that have been coming into town for the most part are not union jobs. So again, you have kind of a generational divide between people who had been in the United Auto Workers because the General Motors plant and all of its supplier companies were all part of the

same U.A.W. Local. And that's still very important to these people, even after the work has gone away. But, again, young people coming of age are not getting union jobs. So, I think the interesting question, again, is going to be, what happens over time? Janesville is still a Democratic-leaning place. That's associated with this union identity, even though Wisconsin as a whole in the 2016 election voted for the Republican, for now President Trump, the first time since the 1980s it had voted Republican in the presidential election. Janesville did not. Janesville narrowly voted for Hillary Clinton.

Ryan: You've alluded to the county partnership, and now some of the national politics versus Janesville's holding out and disagreements. I'm wondering what the state politics were during the experiences that Janesville was going through and how Madison, as a state capital, was involved in some of things happening in Janesville and some of the regional struggles.

Goldstein: Let me tell you a state and a national political fact. The national fact is that Janesville is the hometown of Paul Ryan, who is now speaker of the House of Representatives, and Paul Ryan was quite involved with the effort that took place right after the plant closing announcement happened to try to persuade General Motors to give the Janesville plant another vehicle to manufacture. He's obviously a very conservative Republican. He does not believe in earmarks, in other words, sending money back home to help communities. His district is configured geographically so it's a pretty safe seat, even though most people in Janesville are Democrats. So, there's a bit of a conflict between this now very powerful member of Congress and the views of his hometown.

When I began researching Janesville in 2011, about two and a half years after the General Motors plant closed, Paul Ryan was not who he became politically. He had not yet been chosen as Mitt Romney's vice-presidential running mate in 2012. He wasn't even a committee chairman, let alone the House Speaker, so his power has grown a lot over the years that I worked on this book. But his political outlook has not changed. People in Janesville tend to like him. They think that he's a decent guy, hardworking. They don't have to share his political outlook. So, he's a national figure on the home stage. In terms of the state's politics, in 2011, a man named Scott Walker was elected governor of Wisconsin. He replaced a Democratic governor. Scott Walker is kind of a firebrand conservative. One of the first things that he did,

which he had not announced that he was planning to do during his campaign for governor, was to persuade the legislature to weaken the rights of public employee unions. That was a very controversial act.

There was actually some conflict within Janesville, in which, some people kind of listened to the portrayal of Governor Walker and some of his allies, of public employees as “fat cats” who had too many benefits. There were people in Janesville who became resentful of schoolteachers, even though they had formerly been union members themselves, because they were out of work and schoolteachers still had their jobs. So I think that there was a way in which the kind of political animosity in Madison, as I wrote on one page, has spilled down the interstate about 40 minutes to the south to Janesville and raised political friction in what had been a pretty harmonious town.

Ryan: What do you see as the future of Janesville specifically, and broader implications?

Goldstein: Well, as I’ve been saying, Janesville is the antithesis of a place that just laid down and took it, when the heart of its economy went away. It’s still trying very hard to create its future. And there was a very big-deal thing that just happened in the past couple of months. I’m going to give you a little bit of history to explain what’s going on now. The assembly plant for years was in a category called standby within General Motors that meant that nothing was being made at the plant, but it was eligible to be reopened if the market for cars or trucks or S.U.V.s ever warranted it. The union fought very hard for it to stay on standby for a couple of rounds of contract negotiations between the National United Auto Workers and General Motors management.

In the most recent contract, which was negotiated in 2015, that standby status was converted to permanently closed. That was a very big deal, and it meant that the city government leadership, which had been starting to get pretty eager to try to find another use for this huge tract of property, could look for a buyer. For about a year there were bids being received from a couple companies that were interested in the plant. It was not clear whether any of it was going to come to fruition, but just in the last month or two, General Motors has sold the property to a company based in St. Louis that specializes in distressed industrial properties. That’s going to change Janesville’s future. Now, it’s completely unclear what this company is going to do with all this property, but the company has been saying that it’s pretty

likely that within a matter of months it's actually going to tear down all or part of the assembly plant. So that will even change the physical aspect of what's been the heart of Janesville's economy, but what's going to come of it, who knows?

Neda Moayerian: Please elaborate a little bit more about how higher education and training programs are not really helpful. What is the problem here that these don't train people for future jobs?

Goldstein: I think that part of the issue is that there's a widespread underestimation of how hard it is for workers to go back to school and for colleges that are specializing in this kind of vocational training to train people who've been factory workers when they arrive at school in their 30s or 40s. It's just really hard to learn to study again. Really hard. It's really hard to start studying when you haven't been a student in school for a while, when you're worrying about how your family is going to afford dinner. I mean, there are a lot of pressures on these people. I remember one of the counselors at Blackrock Technical College, the college in Janesville that was doing a lot of this training, said that she thinks that people don't quite realize that these factory workers were arriving in grief, that this is an extremely hard emotional time for people, and to have to learn to become effective students on top of that is asking a lot of people. I think it's also hard when an economy is bad to predict which jobs are going to exist.

So, this college did a good job of conferring on a regular basis with those businesses that were left in town to try to figure out where jobs would lie and encourage people to train in those fields. There weren't enough counselors, but the job center that we talked about before was doing a lot of interest and aptitude testing to try to help people figure out what they might be good at. The head of the Job Center had this idea at the outset, which was a legitimate idea, that people were kind of locked into factory work because of the good pay, and this would be an opportunity for them to really figure out what they might enjoy better. What the school started to notice was that even after the about-to-become-students former-factory workers had gone through this exercise to try to promote introspection, people were really gravitating to those fields where they thought the pay would be anything like what the General Motors pay had been. And it wasn't necessarily work that suited them. It wasn't necessarily work that was going to materialize, even when the odds were that it looked like it was going to materialize.

To give you an example of that, there is a program that was retraining people to become utility company workers, to climb electric poles, and it really looked like a lot of jobs were going to start coming up in that field because the local utility company had a fair number of employees who were in their 50s who were becoming eligible to retire. But if you think about what happened to people's retirement savings during the recession, the Great Recession, they were decimated. Any little nest eggs that people had saved might have been just obliterated, so those folks kept working significantly longer than anybody had any reason to predict. So there were people who went through this program or part way through it, who were doing fine studying against the odds, and then had to face the hard fact that if they stuck it out, they probably would not find a local job doing what they were training to do. And at that point some of those people left school and began working in General Motors plants hundreds of miles away. It's a hard way of organizing your family life, but a sure-bet way of getting your income back into middle class so you wouldn't end up losing your house.

Morikawa: Thank you, Amy. It's been a real treat to have you with us and being a part of our Community Voices conversation and dialogue.

Chapter 5: Ethan Kent

Ethan Kent, Senior Vice President for Project for Public Spaces

Date of Interview: October 7, 2016

Interviewers: Andy Morikawa, Vanessa Guerra, Heather Lyne, Vera Smirnova

Andy Morikawa: Ethan, let me begin by asking you, using examples from your wide-ranging experiences globally, how do you imagine placemaking in a small community like ours might become a way to engage minority communities and to help the community to take action, addressing centuries old racism.

Ethan Kent: Thank you Andy, for one of the most challenging possible questions. I appreciate it, and being here has been inspiring, with the Virginia Tech students and community here really asking a lot of big questions. To me this region, this part of the country is the heart of much of the placemaking movement that we see, the types of communities that have long been created here, the rural communities, the urban cores, and then the types of thinking that you all are doing—the CityWorks (X)po that I was at yesterday in Roanoke. You're really asking the big questions and leading on some of the innovations as well.

So yes, we're excited to learn about how place and placemaking are means to address some of these really challenging equity issues that are so embedded in our culture, our economy and our institutions. We have found that the focus on place and how we create place together, how we experience it, is a means to have a constructive dialogue around some of these issues that some of us avoid and some of us are just overwhelmed by, in some senses. And it's a constructive discussion to ask people how they experience a place and how they could improve it and then focus on doing these short-term, low-cost elements as a way to change places fundamentally, in a relatively short-term, inexpensive way.

We actually have worked quite a bit in rural communities. We manage a program for the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, called the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design. It's taking us to

some of the more challenged parts of rural America to communities that are dealing with loss of population, with poverty and with shifting economies. Recently, one of the communities we have been working with is dealing with climate refugees; they're actually being displaced by rising sea levels in the Mississippi River Delta and we've been asked to help create a new center for the community to which they're moving.

But in terms of some of the structural racism issues and so forth, in some ways we have found that in lower income and in non-white parts of America, there's a sort of innate culture for placemaking, for using public spaces for being sociable. In a lot of ways, the more formal, white culture of American cities that has been so dominant has really lost a lot of the sort of sociability, the conviviality of what we really think makes up the social wealth of great neighborhoods and cities. So, building on other cultures and the immigrant cultures is a real asset, for one of the things that cities can leverage.

I think the cities of the future that are going to most succeed are cities that don't look at diversity as a problem, but as an asset. They also invite these people to help shape their communities, invite the debate, invite the tensions, and help navigate and facilitate so that no group dominates a space, and no group privatizes a space. Go with the energy. If some group wants to help make it work, that's good, but let's see who's not at the table and who else do we invite in. So, placemaking is just an ongoing conversation of, how do we best create places that meet local people's needs, and how do we get the broader range of people's needs that are participating in the process and in the space, so that everyone benefits?

Vanessa Guerra: In order to shape places, we were wondering, how are project areas chosen? Can you walk us through the Project for Public Spaces process?

Kent: So, Project for Public Spaces is a not-for-profit. We've been around for more than 40 years now and we were set up to sort of put into practice the work of William Whyte and Jane Jacobs and really develop the ways of applying the theories and thinking of Jane Jacobs and William Whyte about how cities and neighborhoods work in public spaces. A lot of our work initially was doing a lot of user-centered design, studying how people behave in public spaces, and making recommendations accordingly.

In the last 20 years, we sort of developed placemaking as a process. It's been about building the capacity of communities, drawing the wisdom and knowledge from them, to inform the visioning process and to build management and governance capacity in communities to implement projects. So, we were lucky to get invited to all different types of contexts around the world, but equally across all political-economic sectors really. It's always by people who are looking to do things differently, that are looking to overcome certain obstacles to innovate regarding placemaking. We've had strong experiences with the nonprofit sector bringing us in, often helping us set up small not-for-profits in different parts of the world that do our work on a more permanent basis in those regions. But whoever brings us in, our job is to make sure it's more multi-sector, so if it's just the government that brings us in, we try to get grassroots energy and the philanthropic and private market sectors involved and likewise, with any other sector.

Guerra: Are there any specific criteria that you take into account before choosing a specific location in which to work?

Kent: We're lucky to be invited in by groups that again, are sort of looking do something differently and sort of know how to use us. So, it's almost always a great match. People find us. We haven't had to say no very often. We wouldn't work on a private space or a mall; we never had to do that. But a lot of our ideas have been applied by developers in private settings as well.

Guerra: And what PPS project do you see as most successful and what is the measure of that success? Could you let us know a little bit about that?

Kent: We think a lot of the projects we've seen that have had the most catalytic impact are these public destinations, often at the centers of cities, a lot of squares and public markets. In our work city-wide, often facilitating placemaking as a citywide agenda, Detroit was probably the example of the city we've worked the most in the last 15-plus years and we've worked in many different contexts around the city. In the downtown, the focus on Campus Martius, their central square, that we've been involved in several phases of, has had a really catalytic impact on getting jobs and people to move back downtown and to create a center for the whole city again and an economic engine that's becoming more inclusive of people throughout the city. Placemaking in general is becoming this narrative for the whole city, where everyone is invited to help shape the city, not just to consume the city,

but to be co-creators of the city, with placemaking as a way to organize that effort.

Guerra: When trying to engage the whole city, what is the biggest challenge when trying to promote community participation and engagement?

Kent: Well, people have sort of been fatigued by planning processes and lots of meetings and engagements. Increasingly, the way to get people participating in the shaping of their cities again is actually to go do things. In one of the lower income neighborhoods we've worked in, in Detroit, instead of having people come to a lot of meetings, we just did sort of a street festival, sort of a temporary exhibit of how a street could be more friendly to that community. We used that as an engagement opportunity and asked people what works, what doesn't work, what else they would do there. Increasingly, engagement and good placemaking isn't just about getting input, it's just the opposite actually. It's about facilitating, challenging, empowering communities to come up with ideas, take responsibility and run with the momentum they can generate.

Guerra: It sounds like a very interesting and complex process. In what way do you sustain relationships with the community stakeholders, after project completion?

Kent: We think that all good placemaking projects can be tracked back to someone whom we call sort of a zealous nut, someone who's really passionate and creative and isn't defined by one discipline. It's the people that invite us in, that we get to work with, that naturally come out of the woodwork in communities or meet the criteria for this affectionate term that we use. Our job is to support them, basically to do their work, to help people see that what they're doing is important, connect partners for them and give them the tools and resources they need. We have a global network of people that are leading placemaking around the world, that we stay in touch with and who could be brought back in. That's why we have this Placemaking Leadership Council, as a network of people leading placemaking globally. So, it's an ongoing process, ongoing questions. You're never done. It's not "place made." It's the process, really, that's key.

Guerra: Could you just summarize a few ideas, outcomes from the recent Future of Places Conference in Vancouver?

Kent: We've been running a whole series of global conferences, some under the name Future of Places, that have included people from more than 100 countries, helping to define the new urban agenda around public spaces in placemaking. The larger mission of that Conference Series has been to turn spaces into places and to move the shaping of cities from being around objects to places. We think that the focus on place enables and draws out many different skills and disciplines, but also re-centers power in communities and grounds city-building in local outcomes and context.

Certainly, there's all kinds of important threads to the conversation, from equity and "right to the city," to access to public spaces, and we were pleased to have gotten a lot of language about public spaces into the sustainable development goals and the new urban agenda. But we think the next phase for the Future of Places that we are trying to push is this idea of place-led cities. How do we not just be sensitive to public space issues and the need for them, but really lead the shaping of cities with people and places as a central goal?

Heather Lyne: Leading off of "the right to the city," I know that PPS now has a relationship with the UN Habitat agency, based on the "right to the city" resolution (the latest was UN General Assembly Resolution/71/256, January 25, 2017 following the Quito Habitat III conference alluded to below). What sort of vision and process are you developing with the UN Habitat agency, on such a large scale?

Kent: With UN Habitat, they've really developed a robust public space program in collaboration with us over the last several years. They have developed some tool kits that have recently been released, with lots of case studies of how cities are leading in many different contexts, from informal communities to the more formal ones, with public spaces.

There are a lot of principles and tools that are being developed and we've done some demonstration projects with them in places like Nairobi and so forth. But the larger goal has been just to get public places to be a cause. There hasn't really been a network of NGOs, of foundations, of government leaders that have seen public spaces as a cause, the way others have. So that's been sort of our role in this, in building a network to support public spaces in urbanization. But UN Habitat and its director, Dr. (Joan) Clos, who is the

former mayor of Barcelona, have been very articulate on this need. It's really a big paradigm shift, in how urbanization is understood and supported.

Lyne: Can you speak to the demonstration project in Nairobi, a little bit more on the details?

Kent: Yes. I didn't get to work on it directly, but we've worked both in some of the Kabira slums and also in the park called Jeevanjee Gardens, which is sort of a central park that had been seen as a problematic space. Now, it's being invested in as a central gathering place where there was once very little public space. In most of these cities, in urbanizing cities, sometimes only 3 or 4 percent of slums are actually public space and UN Habitat is actually recommending that more like 30 to 40 percent of cities should be public space. Of course, we think the quality of that space is important and the process through which it's created is also important. It's not just the amount of public space. So, with the leadership of Nairobi, UN Habitat is doing a program to make public spaces really central to their development and to invest in 100 or more public spaces, around the city. I'll be seeing them, when we meet with the Nairobi people in Quito next week for the Habitat III forum. This is the UN-wide conference that happens every 20 years to decide what they call "the new urban agenda."

Lyne: How has the Project for Public Spaces been able to convince communities that people living in the slums have a right to be there? What's the dialogue like, around that?

Kent: Yes, there's this movement called the "right to the city," which is making the case that everyone should be able afford the city, should be able to be in public space and that's something that we certainly support. There are certainly tensions around anyone privatizing space and preventing it from having public benefit and sometimes slums, sometimes informal communities, do privatize and control and limit space for others. Our focus though, is not only the question of whether people have the right to a good place to live, not just a right to the city, but we think they also have a right to live in good places and the right to help shape those places. So, we think placemaking is a way to organize and facilitate all these populations, to make places that really work for them and actually avoid the sort of privatizing or the negative impacts of some informal or poorly managed uses in cities.

Lyne: So, do you see placemaking as a tool for democratization on a global scale?

Kent: We see public spaces, and the process of shaping them into places, as really fundamental to democratization of our cities, to increasing the shared value that's available to everybody. In our view, increasing the power people have in shaping cities literally increases democracy, as people see themselves as citizens involved in governance on a very local scale. We also see public spaces as a way to shift culture and bridge differences among people. We've done workshops and projects in communities with refugees and immigrants, who are often seen by their existing or hosting communities in a fearful way. But simply engaging those people and asking them what they can contribute to public spaces and how they want to participate in spaces, often leads to really good dialogues and actually makes spaces more interesting and fun for everybody.

Lyne: Can you speak to the assignment of sovereignty among UN Habitat, your organization and the host communities with which you are working on projects?

Kent: Our role is really facilitating, training, building capacity. We're not telling people what to do. We're showing people examples of other places and giving people tools to determine their own outcomes. And, we are invited into communities that want us to be there.

Lyne: How would you respond to resistance, saying that your organization and the broader placemaking movement could be categorized as Western or neo-colonial?

Kent: Well, certainly the culture of the people in our office is somewhat Western. We have people from all over the world, but certainly, this movement has emerged in the Western world. Though in a sense, it's because we've been doing such a bad job of it in the Western world and we're exporting a lot of neo-colonial ideas and patterns of organizing, that we find are not working in the U.S. that this movement has arisen. We think that the biggest tragedy is that the rest of the world is just sometimes copying these ideas, thinking that they did work here, when they haven't. We've destroyed our local food systems, our farmers markets, our streets, our walkability, the

sociability of our culture, because of our patterns of urbanization and we've gotten rid of the informal life of our streets.

So, a lot of our message is actually, when we go to India or the wet markets in China, we're telling people not to destroy those market streets, that informality. They're building some version of what they think is modern and developed, so a lot of our impact is simply actually preventing that from happening. We see placemaking as allowing more informality, more local decision-making, more local dialogue, as well as education in the process of planning that builds resilience to global fads and trends and indeed, to the global economy in general. It's ultimately about people deciding their own future on their own terms.

Lyne: What placemaking have you done in your own community?

Kent: Great question. The hardest work is always the stuff we've done in New York. We've done more than 130 community projects in New York City during the last 40 years. But we were actually banned by the Bloomberg administration from working there because we were critical of their approach to develop the city. So, we haven't worked there too much in the last year.

One of our projects, the project I actually first started working on at PPS in the late 1990s, Astor Place, has just opened recently and we've worked on different phases of that. That's sort of right next to our office. It's this new plaza, which is a nice public space, but unfortunately the buildings around it couldn't be worse. They're all banks and Starbucks, so we didn't do a good job there.

But I led something in New York called the New York City Streets Renaissance Campaign, which led to something called the Public Plaza Program, which has created plazas in most of the neighborhoods around the city, taking back space from automobiles, usually taking temporary approaches to the streetscape. Many of those have become permanent and really owned by the community, so we're excited about that.

Lyne: When you have areas that have more room for place, or no room for place, or maybe like you were saying, with Starbucks and banks that are completely corporatized, how do you go about addressing placemaking in those areas?

Kent: So, the retail, the edges of a space are key. I think one of the limiting factors for many downtowns is there's this formula of chain retail that is subsidized and the people leasing these spaces want the predictable rents of those chains, so they suck energy and value from communities. We need to put in place patterns and financing structures that make everyone compete to contribute to the value of a space, like a good public market or a really good Main Street with local businesses, every vendor, every business is all adding to the shared value of the space.

And in those places, in a good place, they sort of naturally push out; chains aren't as welcome there and they don't do as well in really good places. There's a lot of underlying structural, cultural forces against these places. There's the preservation movement, to preserve the old buildings and those businesses are key. But also, just community organizing, community support, getting people to realize they need to buy locally, shop locally and frequent a walkable Main Street, not need to park in front of your store everywhere you go. Main Streets are not about great parking. They're never going to out-compete a shopping mall or strip development center with parking. They're going to compete because they are social, cultural experiences for that community.

Lyne: Do you bike to work?

Kent: I do, every day I bike over the Brooklyn or the Manhattan Bridge and it's just a more fun, faster way to get around, yeah. I am not against cars. I use cars, too, but it's really nice not ever to have to get in the car. I don't enjoy being forced to get in the car.

Vera Smirnova: Continuing on the topic, how do you keep placemaking methods from becoming a commodity?

Kent: Yeah, there's always this sort of tension to co-opt placemaking and sort of formularize it. Some of the aspects of placemaking, the solutions do become a little rote in an effort to show economic impacts. It took us a long time to show that and we did need to commodify it actually a little bit, to get some momentum around public spaces, to get people investing in public spaces again. But certainly, one of the threats to it is that, "who's benefiting?" Now that we've proven it creates a positive economic bottom line, it's just the people adjacent to these spaces that are benefiting and people that own

property. So, we do need to make sure that these spaces do not become just sort of commercialized, aesthetic, sort of pristine kind of places.

So, a lot of our work has been in some of the lowest income neighborhoods of the U.S. and in the global south, where we're showing that these spaces, these people, these communities, actually can create good places that meet their needs, reflect their values very inexpensively, and get lots of other outcomes, not just economic ones, but economic ones too.

Places are defining for cities and the place attachment that people can create in their communities is actually really key. This idea of place attachment, sort of the lovable city and lovability, is perhaps even a more primary goal than livability. I think livability, as a goal, is something we all deserve but it has perpetuated a quantification of cities and has correlated with the most expensive cities to live in. The most livable cities are the most expensive and providing facilities and focusing on quality and the quality of the environment is a very expensive focus, whereas focusing on the human, cultural, sociability of an environment is sometimes more affordable. The sorts of lighter, quicker, cheaper approaches we promote to public spaces are not huge investments in the beautification of the environment, but a bit more about the human use and the economic activity in the spaces that is more democratic and more affordable.

Smirnova: In your rich experience, have you ever had to deal with such situations where big businesses, big corporations, or even governments were interested in placemaking as a way for obtaining profits for themselves, to essentially be using the image of community engagement?

Kent: On one level, we want to show how placemaking has benefits for everybody and we just want to make sure it's not defined by one sector or no one is alone in benefiting. We want to democratize the value sharing of great places and define value more broadly than just money as well. Certainly, there's always going to be pressures and you have to be very vigilant that corporations aren't the only ones that are benefiting from this. There are a lot of corporations that are now realizing public spaces are valuable in trying to do product launches and trying to do sponsorships in spaces that do start to cross some of those lines of privatization. But there are also a lot of corporations that are realizing this is a great way for them to be philanthropic, to be civic partners, to give money in ways, and to do

advertising and promotion in ways that give back a lot more than some of the more negative ways they're doing advertising and promotion.

So, we're trying to facilitate a good role for corporate citizenship and for philanthropy as well, to facilitate placemaking. We actually have a great partnership with Southwest Airlines, who came to us, and is a leader not only in the conversation but also in demonstrating how philanthropy in general, not just corporate philanthropy, can be structured to have a really big impact, with relatively small grants. Southwest not only supports the product, but also the process and the capacity of communities to sustain their own places.

Smirnova: Can you speak more about your experience of being engaged with such a large corporation as Southwest and what role they play in placemaking?

Kent: Well, they came to us because they wanted to support a cause that corporations weren't yet supporting and we talked about how our placemaking could be sort of a new environmental movement, how placemaking can be about creating a world that thrives, and about connecting people to each other.

They funded a study first at MIT, to examine placemaking. This study found that the biggest benefits of placemaking aren't just the places themselves, the fun nice place, but actually the social capital that's built, the human connections that are built through the process of placemaking. So, they have funded us to do demonstration projects in now 18 cities.

The first project was putting a beach in the center of Detroit, which occurred during the city's bankruptcy. Now, the goal is to get to all the cities they fly to and do a whole range of different placemaking projects, and also support the thought leadership in the movement as well. It's been great to have. In a way, the corporate community was missing from the placemaking conversation, as it has been very defined by a grassroots community-led dimension which is, we think, a foundation of it. But we want to show how placemaking can scale and be supported at a bigger level, and we need to think bigger about what the movement can accomplish.

Smirnova: When you put place in the center of policy and governance-making, you immediately engage with issues and questions of land, land

tenure, security of land tenure, and privatization of land. So how do you deal in your group with this complexity of different overlapping interests, that are involved in appropriation of land at some level?

Kent: We often find ways that the overlapping, competing interests can yield something positive. We think, in a way, our built environments have been shaped by people competing to take a value from place. In the best places, everyone is competing to add value, and we've seen that happen in places that are owned privately and publicly alike. It often is the contested places that allow for this tension to occur and to shift. Sometimes, it's the negativity in the debates that really enables a good conversation and people to have to come up with a more creative solution.

The best places are financed by a range of different sectors, not just by one. They're the ones that are sustained and healthiest. So, the feeling of ownership, the literal ownership and the sense of ownership, is very broad and diversified in these spaces. There's no real hard and fast rule. Some of the best public spaces are actually privately-owned. We want to support more public ownership of public spaces and public access to them, but there's a whole range of different types of public spaces, and publicly accessible spaces that are valuable and important in communities. Some of the most valuable public spaces, and this is true for rural areas too, are a store or a shop like a general store, a coffee shop, those are the places that matter most to people. We can't be so dogmatic about what a public space needs to be.

Smirnova: Let's speak a little bit about the example that has been praised by Jane Jacobs, Greenwich Village in New York City, that was really diverse, ethnically, socially and economically in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, it constitutes the most expensive piece of property in the city, with all white, affluent families living there. What is your take on what happened there? Do you think placemaking can return this neighborhood to a more democratically representative community?

Kent: Great question, and in a way, I actually think that its success has proven Jane Jacobs correct in that she was saying this is the great urbanism and now everyone wants this. Certainly, part of the challenge is that we've destroyed, because we didn't listen to her in the 1950s and 1960s, we've destroyed most of the Greenwich Village urban fabric of our cities. We have

not built any of it. We've been building the sort of suburbanization of rural, suburban and urban areas, sort of very private, energy-sucking buildings from streets. Other people have been criticizing her also for not appreciating density, that Greenwich Village wouldn't have been so expensive, if it just built higher.

It is a much more complex issue, but generally we think it's not so true. There's a lot of housing demand in New York and a lot of unaffordable cities and we could use more units, but the stuff that's being built is very high-end apartments. It's a lot of investment properties. People aren't really living in these buildings and they're not adding to street life. The way these buildings meet the street is not very friendly. There's not very much retail, and when there is retail, it's chain retail. It's not about the local economy or local culture and life. The economy and culture of the people who live in these buildings isn't really adding to the street life or the local economies that are more inclusive of the older parts of these neighborhoods.

So, it's not to glorify, not that we need to keep static the historic form or just glorify that as the only way to build things. We need new buildings that lead with place, too, and right now the buildings built under the auspices of "oh, we're just creating housing units and density" are sucking value from the skyline, the street life and the local economies and cultures of those communities.

Smirnova: So, what specific strategies did your group use to avoid the racial and economic segregation in neighborhoods?

Kent: Yeah, so the projects in Detroit, people were isolated because there's just no public space for people to gather within their own neighborhoods and within the city as a whole. There weren't places that people felt comfortable or attracted to be in. Places like this beach that we created in the center of the city are places where people mix and difference doesn't seem like such a big deal anymore, when you're around people in a comfortable space. We actually have done studies that show that there are certain places where people of difference feel most comfortable and its beaches, real beaches—this was a temporary beach, but proved the point again—and farmers' markets and playgrounds.

And so, we are learning more and more around what types of places are like

this. But then, how do we also engage people in the process of shaping these is key, giving people agency to determine their city. Detroit like everywhere, has tensions. Now that it's cool to be downtown, a lot of the wealthier white people have moved downtown and some of the people from the neighborhoods don't feel as welcome. So, there's a little bit of a boon for the people that own the properties there. But there is this sort of doing well by doing good, too. They are adding to the public realm, and to a place and the economy. And truly, they're making some efforts to make the benefits more inclusive and hire people locally and all the jobs are being created there. It's a big issue, a lot more to discuss there.

Smirnova: Speaking of Detroit and other cities located in the rust belt that were hit by de-industrialization forces and the economic crisis, do you think that place and placemaking can serve a role of eroding or promoting urban resilience to economic shocks and crises?

Kent: Yeah, so we're looking at the role of place in resilience, on many different levels, and how place attachment needs to be a key focus for cities and rural areas. We need to understand what it is that leads people to be attached to the place. So, resilience, we talk about of all kinds of personal disasters, terrorism and environmental disasters, our attachment, our connection to place is at the heart of it. And it's social capital, social networks that yield most of the aid after any of these types of disasters. In some studies, 95 percent of assistance is rendered through social networks and it's the networks built through our connection to place. They're sustained after disasters because of the qualities of attachment to place.

How we build attachment is key. There was a study recently by the Knight Foundation called "The Soul of the Community" that found that what led people to be attached to a place are very much the same qualities we find make a good place. They say it was cultural openness, opportunities for social engagement, and the aesthetics of the place. And they found that when there are higher rates of attachment, there is higher economic growth and higher entrepreneurship in that space. So, we're starting to understand these softer sides—they were perceived as a softer side, but they're actually really fundamental to economic growth and resilience.

I think we're moving from an era in which city leaders thought that economic development was about just attracting the next company or the next second

industry in this sort of very ephemeral, and or even just attracting talent and just competing with the sort of zero sum game of economic development, and place is about an additive quality of creating these virtuous cycles of people adding to place, working together, that we think actually lead to innovation, new jobs, new ideas, new cultures that keep getting fed back into the shared value of the place, that unique identity of places that truly sets cities apart, and allows them actually to compete. So, it's the cities that allow people to shape the place, invest in it, that are open to that, those are the ones that are going to succeed in the future, as people can move where they like and invest where they like.

Guerra: So, in your vision statement, PPS hopes to be the central hub of the global placemaking movement, connecting people to ideas, expertise and partners who share a passion for creating places to promote social connections and interactions. So, is PPS the expert or is the community, in this process?

Kent: One of the first principles of placemaking is that the community is the expert. We think that communities know a lot about how to use a space and how to participate in it, but also they need to be supported to become the expert, they need to be facilitated, and so one of our roles is to help people see that and to give people the tools and resources to learn about what makes good public spaces and to learn what works, what doesn't work, but also to network with each other in a community. A lot of our role is just connecting, facilitating this in a city-wide level or around a place or internationally, connecting the placemaking movement.

We think it's through networks that change is going to happen the fastest. Most of change has been defined more around people competing for one person's solution or one person's problem to be more important. We see place as a way, in a placemaking movement, actually to connect people that may have different causes to something more shared and to think bigger about how to create a world that works. Addressing climate change or equity, or health issues alone isn't really getting that far. We see, at a local or global level, visioning and creating thriving places as actually enabling the collaboration, the creativity and most importantly the capacity actually to challenge these fundamental issues.

Lyne: It sounds like what you're saying is really a restoration of dignity, in a

lot of ways. I did want to ask, now that we have sort of the governance and process in place, what does a day in the office actually look like for you?

Kent: We're all learning how to do this and so our office is chaotic and fun. We're lucky, being in New York, we get people from other countries coming in to visit every day. We had groups of Chinese mayors visit last week. Back in the office, I have Mexican students coming in, so it's very global, international. We get calls, every day it's from somewhere else asking for something. It challenges us to learn about, "well, we hadn't thought about how to do that," and so the learning curve for us is always really high. Our goal is to not just to keep doing projects. We're trying to sort of shift the organization to connect people and to be a movement-building organization, to inspire people through writing and communicating what people are doing around the world, what we're learning and by reflecting all the tensions in placemaking, and who's defining the placemaking movement, and where all the good debates are. So, it's always dynamic, it's always fun.

Smirnova: So, how many applications do you have from recent graduate students?

Kent: It's just like people who choose to work at any place really, it's a sort of a self-selecting group. It's people that really want to do things differently. The people who work with us are all kind of misfits in a way. They're all people that aren't following a sort of a straight career track, of just becoming part of a discipline, that sort of fall between the cracks of different disciplines.

So, yeah, we attract some amazing people. We're lucky to get to do that. But I think our biggest impact is actually not the people that work in our office, but the people that we connect with, who are doing this work all around the world. They're the ones that we actually learn the most from, that are doing the hardest work and they're more central to our organization than the people even who work there. They're the people that are the fuel, that inspire us, that inform us, that are in a way, sort of doing projects for public spaces around the world.

Smirnova: So, what advice would you give to people who want to get engaged in the placemaking process with you, or not with you?

Kent: I think the best thing to do is actually just to go do stuff in your

community and learn. I find that people of all disciplines and backgrounds that I meet, the people that are most successful and fulfilled in their professions are people who don't let the discipline define them, but instead define their own paths. They learn so much more in the process because when you have to make a project happen, to get something to happen, you learn about all the different skills and how to draw on them all and you learn to be more of a facilitator and inspirer of change. And you learn to get other people to support you.

These are skills that we're not really taught in our school environment. Our schools teach us to look at a set of data, come up with a solution and then push that through or talk to the experts, essentially. We're not taught to facilitate and draw out the creativity and impact of others. In some ways, we need placemaking breaking down a little bit of that culture, of how we've all been trained and over-trained in our education.

Guerra: Just a final question, when did you know you were interested in community placemaking and how do you keep the motivation going?

Kent: I think in some ways, just like everybody else, I think we all have great memories of places growing up and travelling and I was particularly lucky to get to travel a lot, growing up. My father had a passion for public spaces and placemaking and I learned through him and through the people that he's connected with, and attracted, around the world. It's just contagious, I think. Everyone that we talk to wants to have an impact and live their lives through participating in places, improving them, making them work. When you have great experiences and see how a place supports you and supports you connecting with others and the happiness that it can generate, you see how this can be contagious and that it can grow, like a virus. We want to create a virus of great places and people helping to shape them all around the world.

Chapter 6: Pam McMichael

Pam McMichael, Executive Director, Highlander Research and Education Center (at time of interview)

Date of Interview: November 29, 2012

Interviewers: Andy Morikawa, Lyusyena Kirakosyan

Andy Morikawa: We're going to jump right into this conversation and maybe you could just say a few words about the Highlander Center.

Pam McMichael: Sure. The Highlander Center celebrated its 80th anniversary this year. It started in 1932 during the Great Depression. Highlander has now, for eight decades, worked to build strong grassroots movements to bring about change for fairness and justice in people's lives in their communities. We're known for bringing people together to learn from each other. Art and culture have always been infused in the work that we do and Participatory Action Research also has been an important methodology for the Center. And Highlander has been a standard bearer for popular education methodology and popular education more generally, meaning, learning from each other geared toward action.

Morikawa: How long have you been serving the community?

McMichael: That's a good question. I grew up in a family that believed in service and family helping family as well as neighbors and friends. So, in that sense I would say I was steeped in such service all my life. I've been at Highlander as a staff member and then as director for seven and a half years.

Lyusyena Kirakosyan: Pam, what is your idea for change that you would like to share with others?

McMichael: To lead into that question, I would say that we're all faced with choices to look around us and ask, is society structured the way I want it to be? Does it fit with my notion of fairness and justice and is it serving people? Are we meeting the needs of all people? Are we throwing away people? Who are we leaving in? When I look around, I see a lot of unnecessary suffering.

I see exploitation of people's labor. I see curtailment of people's civil and human rights. I see that as a society we could do a lot better and be much more creative, fair and just.

From that standpoint then, my ideas about making change are to find yourself in alignment with other people who share similar ideas, create a movement that encourages those individuals to bring their full selves to the work and that's based on shared values and vision. When I say, find people with a shared vision and values, that doesn't mean to throw away people who don't think just like you. It means to consolidate around addressing the question: What kind of society do I want to live in and is this it? And if it's not, then how do I work toward that with other people? I think change is not a solo act. Rather, it is about communities and groups and people working together for collective power to bring about things that are really transformative, and working to ensure potential to do that.

Morikawa: Seems like one of the hallmarks of the Highlander Center's approach has very much to do with listening and being attentive to the voices of people and community.

McMichael: Yes, it is that deep listening that lets you hear what people say, and listening is not a passive act. Listening is a very active act. Listening gives the space for you to hear what people need, what they think. It creates a space for expansive ideas to flourish, and for us to know as Highlander, how we can help nurture or provide the kind of support that people need. Our role as a regional organization is to help, to put our yeast some place, so to speak, to help change efforts grow and move beyond maybe where they were was, or to help them connect to something, to be bigger, more effective.

Morikawa: So, Highlander's not out in front of the parade leading and telling people what to do?

McMichael: That's right. Now, there have been times that Highlander has been a key leader and played a key role in significant movements that have come out of the South. It has sought consistently to create space where people can come together to do the work themselves. So, as an education arm during the early years of the labor movement in the 1930s and 1940s, Highlander was that space where people came to learn about what their rights as workers were and how they could build a movement to strengthen

those efforts. We've always been situated in Appalachia, but there've also been times during our work where that has been a more intensive focus, and the Center's efforts have always been based on deep listening and seeking to identify what people need to help move their work forward. So, it's a both-and. There are times that we see something where it's like, "Yes, we need to get out and say this," but we typically play a nurturing and fostering, connecting and convening, or incubator of ideas kind of role.

Kirakosyan: Pam, you mentioned differences in values and in vision that may have the potential to divide people and communities. How have you tried to bridge those in your work?

McMichael: I think one way is that we honor differences, or what we would call being able to bring your full self to the movement. We are different. Many of us carry multiple identities when it comes to race, class, gender, sexuality, family relationships, rural, urban, our experiences as immigrants or not. So, to be able to invite people to the table as their full selves is one of the ways to help bridge those differences, that you don't have to leave this part of yourself at the door to come work together.

We had this convening at Highlander called Southern Strategies, and the purpose was to bring people together across the region to talk about some of its challenges from different points of entry and to develop strategies together aimed at bringing more resources to our region, and also how getting to know what each other was doing might make our own work more effective. So, in the room was a former and current civil rights leader displaced by [Hurricane] Katrina, who had moved to Atlanta. And in the room, too, was a former coal miner from Kentucky now working to stop mountaintop removal. A young Latina woman from an immigrant family working on environmental justice issues in Texas also participated, as did youths from Miami who were working on gentrification issues in their town.

On the surface, they were a racially diverse group working on different issues, but as people got to know each other in conversation and working together, you could see the connection that people made around the common experience of displacement. We often don't think about people being displaced within the U.S., but each of those individuals' stories was about displacement within the communities in which they lived. That fact connected participants. They also connected on the many ways our country

allows forced displacement, to the point that the civil rights leader said to the man working to stop mountaintop removal, “Brother, I didn’t know that white people in the U.S. were displaced before I met you.”

You could also see white people in the room hear and see the connections made about how we also, as working-class white people, weren’t going to have fairness and justice without building a racially just society. That was a powerful experience for me. It was about relationships and it was also about shared political context.

Kirakosyan: What has your personal leadership journey looked like? You said you come from a family that valued service. Would you share a formative experience, or a moment?

McMichael: I came from a close-knit family and people were leaders in my church and I just always was active in doing things. In terms of one moment, that’s a hard question. It feels like a trajectory of different experiences and I’m thankful that I’ve had people to learn from. I think that’s the thing I would pull out as a theme is that I’m thankful to the people that I learned with and from.

As a white woman in Louisville, Kentucky, I was working in social services and that experience prompted me to question some things about race. So, I intentionally put myself in a community organization called the Kentucky Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression. And I feel schooled by black and white civil rights leaders. Just about everybody in that organization was a volunteer. To see what people gave and committed to hold that space, to be an organization where individuals could bring their personal experiences of racism was eye-opening for me. Here was an organization that was seeking to take on racism structurally. That was a pivotal moment for me, to become part of that organization, to seek out that group, because of what I was learning in my other life experiences.

I’ve had other times. Sometimes you have these kicks in the belly, where people say things, and it’s hard to hear, but you know by the reaction in your body that what you just heard was true, and it’s going to shape the way you think about everything you think about from then on. I think about those kinds of experiences, too. They’ve helped shape me as a leader. And I’ve been thankful that my life has provided opportunities to work cross racially

and cross culturally in terms of just building that strong kind of movement. We too often get intentionally fragmented and then cannot find common ground in this work, so the lessons I learned about building a movement where we're not going to fragment along those lines—race, class, gender, sexual orientation—have been very important in my leadership development.

Kirakosyan: Can you share more about how you work with communities to craft a collective and democratic vision of the future?

McMichael: When I went to work at the Highlander Center, I would get that question a lot: What is your vision for Highlander? I'd like to first say what I mean by vision in terms of some learning that I've experienced at Highlander. We were doing a strategic planning at Highlander right as I came aboard and Hollis Watkins, who is a civil rights leader, and was active in the civil rights movement in Mississippi as a teenager, made this statement in that session: "Vision isn't about where you're going; vision is about how you get there." And I didn't understand that. I thought vision was where you're going. So, I mulled that over. I didn't get it, but I never forgot it.

And then I was on a pontoon boat on a lake in eastern Tennessee, hosting some visitors to Highlander from Hawaii who were doing some similar work on the islands and a woman brought up this conversation about vision, and she said, "Well, vision isn't about where you're going. Vision is how you get there." And I said, "Wow. If these two people both say it, it's got to be right, so let me unpack this." And she explained it this way, using the landscape of where she's from as a teaching tool: If you're on one island and you want to go to another island, the vision isn't to go to that other island. The vision is knowing what kind of boat you need to build to get to that island. And then I got it, because it's easy to say, I want to live in a better world. The vision part is knowing how we put one foot in front of the other to build that better world. From that standpoint, I think vision can only be collective and shared.

And so, there's a both-and. Somebody might have an inspiring vision that invites people to come along with them. I think there have been definitely times when movements are catalyzed around an inspiring leader, but movements aren't built by inspiring leaders. Movements are built by masses of people who share a vision and helping to make it and move it forward. I think that the way we come at it at Highlander is through conversations that arise from, and consolidate around, our values. We're trying to do some

exercises about what kind of ship we need to build, although we also use, in terms of our own locale, the terrain of the mountains as a metaphor. So, coming from shared values and knowing where you want to go, but then what are the means needed to get there? And in that sense, the vision has to be shared and it has to be democratic because none of us can get there on our own.

Morikawa: I like that perspective. It's not just something in the distance, but it's what we are doing right now and yet, it's still informed by a sense of possibility.

McMichael: Some people would call that strategies, or some people would call it tactics, but it's how we build this movement seeking social transformation for justice; that's really what the vision is about.

Morikawa: It's the everyday relationships.

McMichael: It's not the transformation itself.

Kirakosyan: How do you inspire people in our liberal society in which everyone is concerned about individual well-being and progress rather than that of the collective.

McMichael: I think that there are a couple of conversations in your question. It's the self-focus of Americans. It's also the real fears people have, because not everybody is doing well. There's that both-and: there's a lot of privilege as Americans and also, there's a lot of struggle within certain populations in "America." And I think that there's that privilege and also accompanying that is fear. There are real fears and there are also imagined fears and there are also political strategies aimed at making people afraid. There are intentional mobilizing strategies arising from claims that if this group of people gets something, it's going to take something away from someone else. All of those fears are uphill challenges. And so, as one way to address them, we at Highlander are always looking for opportunities that allow diverse groups of people to connect with each other, to learn about each other's work, to work together towards something tangible.

I came from a tradition of both-and kind of organizing, in terms of the people that taught me in Louisville, Kentucky, that you're working on something concrete while holding out that vision of that better world that you want

to live in. Another way to put that is to say that it's not just what you work on, but how you work on it, that matters. You might be working on this one particular thing, but how you work on that one thing builds a movement that's bigger than that concern.

For instance, I was part of efforts in Louisville, Kentucky, to get sexual orientation and gender identity added to local civil rights laws, but we also connected that work to racial and economic justice. If the fish or meat packers were going out on strike, our campaign called its base to support them, even though it was a Lesbian, Gay, trans organization. If a white police officer shot a young Black man, the fairness campaign called on its members to protest that event and to work toward its just resolution.

The fairness campaign called on you to support the strikers. It's that connection of issues. You might get involved in something because of one thing that hits you, but you're creating opportunities through that involvement for people to realize, "I'm not alone in this, I'm not the only one being hit, and I'm connected. Even though my issue looks different, I'm connected to these people in this way." It's slow work sometimes. It's tedious work sometimes. But coming from a long line of quilters, it's the only thing I know that really lets us stitch something together strong enough that can really hold against the intentional fragmentation that gets thrown at us.

Morikawa: In light of these comments, what is your analysis of the election that we've just come through?

McMichael: My analysis of the election is that there were a lot of voter suppression tactics, a lot of money spent to distort issues, and so I'm buoyed by the fact that it seems like those things did not work, or that the voter suppression tactics definitely seem to have backfired a lot. It's humbling and moving to see people stand eight hours in line to cast their vote. Very inspiring to see people step up and take chances and encourage other people to do the same.

Morikawa: In your work at Highlander you have many different programs and opportunities for groups and individuals. Tell us a bit about your work with young people. We know that those early years for ourselves and for our children are so important, that formative process, the impressions that one gains from an inspiring summer camp counselor or a character or a person

when we're very young. My sense is that Highlander is very much invested in that kind of work.

McMichael: That's true. I was thinking back on my own life and some of those experiences that were so formative for me as a young person. We have a program called Seeds of Fire. There's a book about Highlander's history by Frank Adams with that title too, and that is the name of our youth and intergenerational program as well. So, we have a program that works with youth organizers working on issues in their communities. Youths can apply to come to us as a summer camp experience and we also provide program support in the community, too, not just at the camp.

And so people come, two youths and one adult, usually about seven to 10 groups per session, and it's a powerful experience to see these individuals meet with each other, to see what people are doing in their local communities, and over the course of eight days you can really get to know each other, dive deep, unpack things with each other. That's a core program. And out of that and some issues we've learned through it, we've deepened our focus on juvenile justice issues as well as becoming more mindful of what happens in our educational system, because these are concerns that youths have brought to our attention.

We also helped launch a couple of networks within Appalachia, a group called Stay Together Appalachian Youth, or STAY, which is young people in Central Appalachia wanting to create an organization that helps them stay in the mountains they love and not have to leave due to economic considerations, and also wanting a multicultural life where they live. We also assisted with development of the Appalachian emerging leaders network.

In addition to particular youth programs, we also look to incorporate youths into other initiatives and involvement into other things we do, so it's not just youths participating in a youth program, but youths involved in many aspects of what we do. And so intergenerational organizing is very important to us, both as an activity and as a frame. At Highlander we don't pass the torch from one generation to another, we say instead that we light each other's torches. Every generation has something to give and something to learn from other generations.

Kirakosyan: We were talking about the creative and democratic dialogue and

communities engaging in such efforts. What do you think are the capacities that individuals, groups and communities need to be engaged in creative and democratic dialogue?

McMichael: We create listening opportunities for people to tell us what they need. Sometimes that's by groups and sometimes that's calling people up, one on one, so both formally and informally we seek a lot of information to answer the question you raise. What we hear from people consistently is that people want political education. They want a connection to history. They want to know about the possibilities of the work going on now, how we learn from history to make what we're doing now stronger or better.

People really speak positively of the methodologies of popular education and cultural organizing because they really value the experience of the person, and people also talk about wanting to have opportunities to work with people who are different than them, so they learn how to work with someone who might be different. People also talk about wanting to learn good organizing skills. There are a lot of elements of new organizing and old organizing models that don't work, given how fast society is changing, but there are some basic things that work in organizing and we're also hearing people say there's less infrastructure somehow in our southern region, that supports organized training. And so, people are saying we're missing some of that.

I think that one of the things that we talk about at Highlander is trying to model when you're doing this work in terms of democratic dialogue and problem solving to create multiple ways that people who aren't comfortable talking otherwise can share their ideas. And so that's why art and drawings and role-plays and different kinds of participatory activities are important, because some people are comfortable talking, like me, and some people are better in sharing what they have to say by other means. So, think in terms of getting the different voices out, making sure that there are different ways for people to contribute to the dialogue. We also seek to encourage a spirit of inquiry and that we listen in that spirit and not from a place of reactivity.

And those help to create the space where people are sharing what they have to say, and feeling safe and comfortable in doing so are two different things. When you do this work with people who are different than you, you might not be comfortable, but you have to learn to be safe in that work without

being comfortable, because sometimes we're challenged in our efforts to grow or to rethink an old way of thinking.

Just because somebody disagrees with me and gets a little agitated doesn't mean they're going to come across the room and hit me with something, right? So, we have to learn the difference between safe and comfortable, and know that actually there are going to be times, if you're really stimulated, to think and to look at something differently, when that is actually uncomfortable and that it's OK to live with that discomfort as we make our way.

Morikawa: How did how did you get involved in organizing? What led you to this path?

McMichael: I always was active in my church or my school, but I guess as an organizer I was just curious and I was meeting people, but I also remember coming to this recognition in my days working in social services. We worked with low-income women in Louisville, Kentucky. And there was a common economic denominator of who qualified for our program. Most of our clients did not have cars, but the ones who did were white, and so I started questioning that reality and saying to myself, "Something's going on here. That can't just be because one group is better than the other. This has got to be structural. This is got to be arranged this way." That experience led me on a questioning path, and I was seeking some people to be involved with to know more about the way the world worked to result in those outcomes. I guess I grew up as a farm kid in Kentucky, with that sense of the haves and have nots, and so that also was pivotal in getting me to think about these questions.

Morikawa: Was that sensitivity to the haves and have nots something that came from your family?

McMichael: Yes, it did come from my family and also from the fact that our local farm families helped each other to ensure economic survival. We had crops and we helped each other, and so economic survival was a family and community event. You weren't out on a limb by yourself and so I think that is where I obtained my questioning spirit and that sense of treating people like you wish to be treated. Looking around me as a child, I saw that a lot of people weren't being treated in ways that I was sure they would want to be

treated. I think if I boiled it down to a kernel essence in terms of how I grew up, I would have to say that. My parents both taught and lived that, which meant that I witnessed the way that they lived it.

Morikawa: I want to talk some about the great American Experiment in Democracy and its relationship with the economy. I'm wondering about your thoughts on this mix of democracy, what we view as governance, and the economic system that underlies it and the inevitable tensions that we're experiencing.

McMichael: There's an equation that happens between our economic system and our governance system that I think should be broken down and separated in some ways. Governance is one thing and an economic model is the other. And I think that we're facing some challenging questions related to our governance and we're not being offered a lot of good answers. I think it's a complex question for us to figure out in terms of how we create multiple points of entry and multiple points of pressure to develop an economy and a way of life that's sustainable. There are many things that could be said here. But one important one, pivoting a little bit, is the huge influence of money on the way issues are talked about, debated, framed, spun and how much you have to work through to unpack and decipher all that is really unfortunate in terms of a clean place for us as people to talk honestly and directly about the challenges facing us.

Morikawa: As we head into 2013, we've just had a major election and, in a sense, an affirmation for a sense of disquiet about the status quo and a real search for how we might organize ourselves differently. There seem to be signs or indicators of new possibilities. A fellow colleague of ours, Frank Adams, has been involved in worker-owned cooperatives, for example. They're not too widespread. There are a couple here in the New River Valley that are quite successful, a tire distribution company, for example, that's done very well. I'm wondering if you see how those particular expressions of enterprise—worker-owned cooperatives or cooperatives—are doing and are there signs of other possibilities perhaps coming to us from other countries from other cultures and experiences.

McMichael: I think there's a lot to learn, both things that people are doing that we may not know about within the U.S., and also what people in other countries have tried, and a lot to learn from those conversations and those

models. There's been some factory repurposing in Central and South America, particularly Argentina, which has done a lot around workers purchasing and retooling factories there. At Highlander we're hearing a vivid conversation about interest in worker cooperatives and we're part of a Southern Grassroots Economies Project. So, I think that there are multiple entry points for solutions to the inequalities created by our economy and I think that is one place where there's some creativity and new ideas occurring. I also think that a share of those efforts have sought to root themselves in democratic participation. There are also some other things that we can be looking at that would be interesting. I know there are some associations and some gatherings that people who do worker-owned cooperatives and firms are connected to and it seems like it would be really important for those connections to happen and for us to think about what sorts of policies and laws could help these cooperatives and other creative small businesses to thrive.

Morikawa: One has a sense that they're just one aspect of a much larger picture. They're not going to be an answer in and of themselves.

McMichael: There's some stuff about sustainability in our consumer society and how much of what is occurring now is really sustainable. So, we've got some very serious questions to answer about how we build sustainable life and thriving communities within those challenges and what shifts we need to make both in terms of our systems and the way we live. What we're doing now doesn't seem to me to be sustainable.

Morikawa: How about in terms of governance? Every time we have an election, it seems like these days we're always campaigning. People are already talking about 2016, which is kind of alarming actually.

McMichael: It is alarming, and I think some of that is the need for the media to keep us whipped up and interested in what they might say next. And I think in campaigns, we talked earlier about organizing, and it's not just *what* you organize on but *how* you organize that's important. I think that point is also applicable to the way we do campaigns. That is, those efforts should not just be about winning, but what candidates are building as they talk about issues. What are our would-be leaders building beyond their campaigns?

Morikawa: Exactly. It's the distinction that you brought up a little bit earlier

about vision, that it's as much the way you're actually doing the work, each step that you're taking. And if what we're doing is seeing each other as either right or wrong or on my side or on somebody else's side we are unlikely to move forward.

McMichael: Or if we believe that electing this one person will fix complex problems, versus realizing that working for this one person gives me the opportunity to talk to my neighbors and friends about questions and concerns that matter.

Kirakosyan: What role do you think education for peace and justice plays?

McMichael: I think they are really critical, actually. I think that education and action go arm in arm, for me and for us at Highlander, too. It's important also that the actions we take be based in an understanding of what's going on while also pushing beyond those confines. But that education is critical on so many levels. I didn't learn anything in my public school history classes concerning social change, really. What little bit I did get was told through the story of singular heroes, not the masses of people. So, social justice education is really critical and there are some great resources toward that end and more. This is one of the opportunities of technology, that there are a lot more things now available at our fingertips. There also can be a lot more misinformation available at our fingertips, as well, but I think education is really critical.

Morikawa: What lies ahead for Highlander?

McMichael: In terms of talking about looking ahead, we just finished our 80th anniversary, so I guess, we already have had some nods toward our 100th. We're in a capital campaign to address some infrastructure needs at our facility, and it's called Generations to Come, because Highlander has served generations during the last 80 years and expects to be here to serve generations to come. And certainly, there was the tendency of young people in our current programs at that 80th anniversary to speak of Highlander as a resource for people in the here and now as well as for generations to come. We are actively having discussions about our understanding of history and that the current context, so there's some work that we're currently in that we will keep doing. We also are looking to expand our work and constantly to bring popular education and cultural organizing tools into all aspects of our

work. The South is changing profoundly due to demographics. We see lots of opportunities and challenges in that work and in building a democratic base to bring about transformative social change.

Morikawa: If folks want to find out more about Highlander Center or would like to make a contribution, where can they go?

McMichael: They can go to our website: www.highlandercenter.org.

Chapter 7: Penny Franklin

Penny Franklin, Montgomery County Elected Official, Union Leader, Activist

Date of Interview: December 4, 2013

Interviewers: Andy Morikawa, Eric Hodges, Elizabeth Jamison

Andy Morikawa: Penny, what happened in your life that motivated you to become so engaged in public life and in community leadership for change?

Penny Franklin: Well, I guess it really started when the school system wasn't treating my children and other African-American children fairly, as far as discipline was concerned, and you don't mess with my kids! That was the first step, and then I became involved with my local union, at first on the trustee level. It just took off from there. Taking care of people, making sure people are being treated right, that was how I was brought up, how I was raised. That's how I got started.

As I was getting started and understanding that my kids were getting older, getting ready to graduate from high school, and believing that we're supposed to leave this place better than it was when we got here, I started having a conversation with God, saying, "OK, what is it you want me to do? What is it?" Since then, He has just been continuously opening doors. That's why I'm doing what I'm doing, because He said, "OK, here you go."

Morikawa: It looks like every time you take a step or do something, that's not the end of it.

Franklin: It's amazing. It just keeps going, keeps going and keeps going. I believe that's because I have made it clear I'm going to be diligent with the opportunities and the responsibilities with which He has blessed me, and that I will do my best to make sure that what I do is a blessing for other folks. I'm hoping that's because I'm doing good work and he's saying, "OK, Keep going, here's something else see what you can do."

Eric Hodges: Penny, I want to go back to what you were talking about

regarding your kids not being treated fairly in school. When that happened, how did you go about getting involved?

Franklin: I talked with the principals. And the NAACP Education Committee became involved, too, and they reached out to other parents. The African-American parents of Montgomery County weren't being believed—the only word I can use—that these things were happening to their children. Things seemed to be taken one incident at a time and nobody was looking at the big picture and asking, what was going on with the African-American children? Sometimes, it was the same teacher repeatedly through the years. The education chair at the time asked us to write statements concerning what had been going on with our children. It was very eye opening at one of the meetings to learn that myself and a couple other parents had the same issues with the same teacher for a number of years. It was working with the NAACP and then just being an unhappy parent who did not let the issue go. I also understood the school system's structure and that there was a superintendent that needed to be engaged and addressed. At that time, he was not very receptive. He was willing still to play that little game: "We are looking into it." My response was to say, "Well, talk to me and tell me what you are doing." You walked into his office and it felt cold and didn't feel like much was going to happen and it didn't.

Thankfully, the county hired a new superintendent. I just happened to be addressing the School Board because the principal to whom I had been complaining told me he didn't care who I talked to. So, I said "OK," and I arranged to address the Board. The new superintendent attended. It was his first Board meeting. That was on a Tuesday night and by Friday morning my mother and I were meeting with the superintendent because he wanted to know exactly what was going on in Montgomery County schools. It has gone on from there.

Hodges: You have to be careful what you say.

Franklin: Yes. I think sometimes in my head. I think a lot of things and I'm going, "If you say it, you have to do it. You have to be careful what you say."

Hodges: Do you think things have improved in the school system as far as people of color being treated more fairly?

Franklin: Yes, we have the data that shows that yes, it has. But at the same

time, you also hear from the students who say we still get called the N-word. Folks also still flash their Confederate flags at us, and I don't feel that I'm getting treated the same way by the teachers in the classroom. We have even had elementary students say, "I raise my hand I don't get called on," and "I tell the teacher or someone that I've been called the N-word," and nothing happens. It's as if the teachers don't know how to handle it. There's an awareness, but as far as folks understanding, how do I deal with it? I think we still have some strides to make there.

Elizabeth Jamison: To follow up on that, I'm thinking about your experiences that led to organizations in which you have been an instrumental leader. I was wondering, what was the inspiration for this? Was it a direct path from your experience as a mom into this ongoing effort now? And what do you hope that your efforts will accomplish at a broader level?

Franklin: Well, I guess from my core, making sure folks are being treated fairly, whether it is my children or someone else's or another person's is what animates me. As far as creating a Dialogue on Race, that arose from having lived here in Montgomery County all my life and understanding that there were segments of my community, the African-American community, who were not being heard and feeling frustrated. My belief is, the squeaky wheel gets the oil, and if I have to squeak really, really loud, then I'm going to get a whole lot of oil. The Dialogue on Race in our community grew. When I raised the thought, could we do this, is this something we want to look at, everyone was like, yes. And it took a lot of time to figure out how to do it, three years, actually. How do we talk about race? It's just snowballed into this wonderful entity of its own.

The African-American folks who have been involved with it are saying, "Someone is listening to my concerns and there are some actions being taken to address them." Montgomery County is the focus now, but OK, we can move this to the world. Quite frankly, everyone needs to be treated fairly, everyone needs to be heard. There's a process we use, and here is what the impact is, how do you think it's going to work in your community, let's make it fit.

Jamison: Could you talk a little bit about the lessons learned? What are some of the most valuable things that you think you took away or the challenges across the first three years?

Franklin: I guess, it is really simple: Sometimes you just have to stop talking and do it. We have a wonderful group of people, a great committee. We called on the Justice Department to help us understand, how can we do this? How can you all help us? We also talked with one of the folks who did a similar thing in the City of Lynchburg. When we first began discussing launching a Dialogue about Race, it did not at first appear to fit what was happening in Montgomery County. There was no big issue, no big incident, anything that said we've got to talk about this. But in a way there was. If you all remember in Blacksburg, the school mascot was an Indian and it changed because a group of Native Americans said, "We feel this is offensive." For 18 months this was an issue in Montgomery County and at a level that really astonished me. I saw people who I'd known for years not understanding that this could be offensive to a group of people. It just took me way back. I had to think about this: "Is this a community and, are these people whom I know?"

Then we hired the county's first African-American superintendent of schools. The local media, some members of the community and some elected officials literally lost their minds. I mean, there's no other way to put it. I helped them understand that you haven't lost your mind, because she was doing the right thing, she was doing things the Board, when they were looking for a candidate, believed needed to happen. And when she came in and did them, as an African-American woman, they couldn't handle it. For two years, when we could have been moving forward in the district, we were putting out fires, and that was wrong, but this community was doing that. When our president was up for reelection, I saw similar things in this community that I was just, like, really!

All three of these things were about race, folks not understanding and accepting that people have feelings. People have concerns, needs and wants that need to be addressed. That's what drove the Dialogue on Race for me. We've got to start talking about this, because if we don't keep talking about it, nothing will change. I am not about keeping things the same. My grandkids are going to live in a better place, if I have anything to do with it.

Hodges: Penny, you have a phrase, "being a citizen in a time of great danger," and I thought that was really interesting. I'm curious what you mean by that.

Franklin: I believe, we are at some tipping points at this time in this country. Let's talk about the justice system. The justice system, by officials' own

account, is biased against African Americans and Latinos, particularly the males. We're systematically being locked up and systematically being given felonies, so that you can't get jobs, you can't vote, you just are not a part of the community. We're going to end up back in the 1600s or 1700s, where you have a handful of people who are controlling everything, and the rest of us, who will be the majority by far, are going to be left out. We're going to be tossed crumbs. You can benefit as a white person and it's just very, very, very, very scary that so many people in this country will be marginalized.

Hodges: One of the questions I hear often when I encourage people to get involved in their communities is, what can I do, what should I do? What would you say that people need to do, citizens need to do, in these times to try to address that issue that you're talking about being on the precipice and making sure that it doesn't go that way?

Franklin: Well, one, you need to show up where decisions are being made. You need to show up and hear what those decisions are and then you need to speak up. If need be, you need to step up and say, "OK, I need to be there to be a voice for those people who are on the other side of this conversation to make sure that we don't tip over to the wrong direction." Show up, speak up, and step up.

Jamison: To that end, your biography mentions that you are an outspoken truth teller. Would you speak a little bit about what that means to you, to be a truth teller as a community activist and community leader?

Franklin: I'm very time-oriented. I do not have time to constantly make people feel good about things that they need to know, things that need to change. Here's the way it is, what do we do about it? Speaking the truth, doing it when it needs to be spoken and to whom it needs to be spoken. Then saying, "OK, how do we fix this, how do we make this work, how do we make it better?" I'm just not with the beat around the bush folks, and it really kind of irritates me when folks go about things that way. Being in the school system, understanding we have 13 years, we have those children for 13 years, and if we're not speaking to and doing things right now, that's another year or two years that this child may not get what they need to be able to be successful, so a waste of time. I don't believe in it.

Jamison: In your quest of truth telling, have you had surprising moments

when that stance opened up dialogues that were unexpected or new opportunities or new directions for you?

Franklin: Again, I believe that when things are opening for me, that's God. The Dialogue on Race has been huge. I could not have imagined that we would have had law enforcement engage at the level that they're engaging. As I spoke before about our justice system, if we have the ear of law enforcement and they're hearing us and saying, "I need to do something differently in my department and I need to take a deeper look at what we're actually doing, and then make a change," that can be huge for many folks in this community, whether black or white.

For me, this Dialogue on Race has just blown me away. I had no idea. The first gathering we had, I was saying, if we can get 30 people there, I'll be on top of the world. It ballooned to more than 100. A lot of those folks have continued to be engaged for almost a year now and are building relationships with each other that weren't there before. When I hear people from the white community and the Black community and they talk about someone that I know, in either the Black community or the white community, I'm going "OK, here we are, we're building these connections." People know each other and that's what it'll have to come down to: build relationships so that there is trust, so that we move forward when folks say I've got an issue or there's a problem, we need to do something about it. I've got people behind me who are saying, "Yeah, we do, and we can, so, OK, let's do it."

Hodges: We've heard a lot about some of the divisions that are in the community, and specifically in this case, talking about race. How important is it to try to build relationships between people on both sides? You talked about that a little bit as you described the Dialogue on Race, but how important is it to build those relationships across those divides?

Franklin: It's crucial. I mean, that is the key. If I don't know you, if I don't know what you're about, what your experience is, what your background is, what your beliefs are, then I can fill that void with stereotypes. Those can be quite ridiculous, really. If I build a relationship with you, if I know who you are, where you live, what your beliefs are, that you have a sense of humor or you don't have a sense of humor, just those simple things that we learn about people with whom we become friends or acquaintances. We can learn, for example, that we may not share a lot, but on this issue we have common

ground and we can work together. I don't believe that we have to be best buddies. If there are issues that need to be addressed, then we need to put all the other things aside and say, "OK I've got some ideas, I've got time, I'm willing, and in many cases I have some funds that I can help with that effort." You have to have some type of relationship, because those with funds are not going to write you a check just because they like your beard. There may be other reasons why they will, but unless they sit down and talk with you or work with you in some way, they won't.

Hodges: What do you think are some of the biggest challenges to building those relationships?

Franklin: The stereotypes. Those are some of the biggest problems in our community, where the demographics are so off, less than 5 percent African-American, the Asian population is just a little above that and then everybody else is below that. You can literally walk out of your house, if you live alone, and you can go all day long in Montgomery County and not necessarily run into another person of color. Those are some of the things that we have to overcome.

What are those gathering places? We have our churches, our synagogues, our religious gatherings, where again, we're very, very separate. That, to me, has always been very strange. For the biggest part, even if it's not the same belief, there is a foundation of love and caring, but on Saturdays or Sundays, we go our different ways. I'm over here, you're over there and the two shall never meet. Some churches, for Black History Month, they have a service together once a year. Quite frankly, I stopped participating with that for my church and other white churches, because what was the point? We already know each other from the community. Why are we coming together one Sunday for a couple hours when we don't come together, we don't even visit each other's churches during the rest of the year?

Overcoming those types of things, that "feel good stuff," and getting down to, "Oh, this doesn't feel so good, but I know I need to push through it because we've got to make things better and do something meaningful, so I can build a relationship with someone else." Those are some of the things that we have to work on. It's not the easy stuff, that's the hard stuff, and Dialogue on Race, again, is an excellent place for anyone to participate in and start working on

that. It can be uncomfortable. It's like a new pair of shoes. You've got to break them in a little bit, so we have to break each other into who we are.

Jamison: In addition to your community leadership, you've also been a union leader, a labor leader. I would be really interested to hear you talk a little bit about your experiences and what you've carried into those places as well. What changes have you seen, and what motivated you to be a union leader as part of your journey?

Franklin: People not being treated fairly. It's that simple. When you go to work every day and you're expected to do your job, you do your job and the company's making lots of money, I expect to get my share of it. I expect to be respected for coming to work every day and doing my job, so that you're making a lot of money. Everyone should be able to get a share of it and be treated literally with dignity. When I first start working with my employer, I made it clear that I have this thing about women not being called girls, honey, sweetheart or any of those things. I told them, every last one of us was at least 18 years old. We are not girls and my name is Penny or Miss Franklin. Do not call me honey, or do not call me girl. That was a change that went on in that building over a couple of years, because, when I heard it, I spoke to it. I know there were a lot of women who said, "Oh, I'm OK with that." Well, if you really think about it, it's demeaning. That's one of the ways that I think I had an impact.

As far as being a union leader, it can be very challenging. In my facility, there are I think seven, maybe six African Americans. We are in southwest Virginia and it has been a real struggle to have folks trust and believe that my interest is their best interest, too, that what I do, what I say on their behalf and decisions that are being made are in their best interests. Sometimes, the color of my skin plays a huge part in how that happens. I have gone from being one of the most wonderful people that folks thought about in the plant to being voted out of office. Then I was constantly called on because I had the skills and the knowledge to do what needed to be done to help keep things moving in a right direction. It's been a struggle, but at the same time, by doing those things and making sure that my Local's voice is being heard, I now have an opportunity to work at the national level, which also brings benefits to my facility. Because we are small, our membership is small. Just like in any other corporation, in unions, it's that squeaky wheel and we're small. Unless you are a squeaky wheel you don't always get things that you

need to support your membership. Again, it goes back to making sure people are being treated fairly and for me, it didn't matter whether you liked me or not, I'm going to do what I feel is best.

Hodges: It sounds like your faith has played a very important role in your work as a leader. Could you say a little bit about how your faith and religion have influenced you in these activities?

Franklin: It's pretty simple. The Golden Rule: Do unto others what you want others to do unto you. We're supposed to be our Brother's keeper. I truly believe that. Not all of us may be able to have huge impacts on people's lives, but being able to make sure someone has a meal, letting someone know that someone does care and understands what they're going through, to me that's being your Brother's keeper. Being there, making sure everything, according to the best of your ability, is going the right way, that people aren't falling through the cracks, people aren't in greater need than you can help control. I believe that God said, and I don't know the verse things, but he said, "OK, so who shall I send?" When I was asking him, "OK, what is it I'm supposed to do?" I was saying to him, "I'm ready to go. Send me." He has continued to bless me with the opportunities to be in positions where I can help people. If I couldn't help people, then what's the point?

Hodges: Do you think people have been losing that mentality of the Golden Rule in our society? Is that why we're having these divides and we're at this time of great danger, or is it more the system itself does not allow people to interact in certain ways to help each other out? I'm trying to figure out whether it's an individual thing or it's something about the system itself that's causing us to be in this difficult time.

Franklin: I like to try to keep things as basic as possible. My first instinct is to say it's an individual thing, because individuals make up systems. If my belief as an individual is, I need to get everything I can for me and if you're not getting what you get, then that's something wrong with what you're doing. I have watched people step on people to get what they need, what they want, with other people just left wondering what happened. I do believe, not only in the world, but in this country in particular, the capitalist system that we live in, where everybody gets their own, everybody pulls themselves up by their bootstraps has a basic challenge; not everybody has bootstraps to pull themselves up by. We did not, and we can't. When this country was founded,

folks that were here did not stand a chance. The folks who were brought here in chains had no chance. Then, when the opportunities were awarded through the legal system, there were stepping stones that were put in place to make sure African Americans and other minorities don't get but so far.

The educational system, again, I know it, and despite how hard folks may think they are working to make things a level playing field, it's not. Individual hearts need to be changed. Minds need to be opened. We do need to go back to that taking care of each other and not, "I'm going to get what I can get attitude."

Jamison: To that end, what do you see as the next big challenge confronting us as a society, either locally or more broadly, as you see it? Where do you see us really needing to focus our attention, as a community leader and as a civil rights activist?

Franklin: Well, one thing is education. We have got to start putting money into education, paying the teachers, making sure that the technology and the systems that we need for our children to compete in the global society are there, and that there's no question when funds are needed to improve it. We need to make sure folks are held accountable for what they're doing in the classrooms.

Accountability is a big thing. I expect folks to hold me accountable, and if not, I'm going to ask them why not. You should be looking at what I'm doing. If someone is not asking me a question, questioning what I'm doing, and I don't have a good answer for it that's moving things forward, then I'm not doing what I'm supposed to do.

From the Labor side, we watch jobs leave this country hand over fist. Right now, there's a big trade agreement out there, Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, we call it NAFTA on steroids, it will help to deregulate some of the regulations that we have in our country as far as environmental things. What a lot of folks don't understand is, when these trade acts go through, for example, NAFTA, they devastate the farmers in Mexico and South America, because corporate America flooded those countries with produce and other things that they had been providing. Now that they're coming to the U.S., why are they here? They've taken our jobs, and they're illegal. You gave them no choice. They're trying to feed their families, so immigration reform would

be another big one. Bring those jobs home and stop subsidizing companies, corporations to take the stuff off shore. People keep saying the jobs are gone. They have to come back, and you have to give incentives, or you penalize these companies for being where they're at and then bringing the junk back in.

How many times have you heard someone say a TV, a watch, or an appliance, they're so inexpensive, it's cheaper to just go out and buy a new one versus fix it. Those were jobs that people had, fixing appliances, cars, and things like that versus just buying another one because it's so cheap. There's a whole lot of things we need to do. For me these days, a lot of times I find myself telling folks follow the money, follow the money and you will see where the problem is. This money-oriented society that we have needs to go back to a people-oriented society and we will be much better off.

Hodges: You talked about the importance of education and it all starting there. What things do we need to be educating people about? What are the capacities people need to be able to step up and speak up and make these changes in the community?

Franklin: One, we need to be teaching each other about each other, the truth about each other, so that folks are educated and not listening to the stereotypes. We need to make sure that everyone has that opportunity. A lot of policies and law systems are going to e-books and going to electronic devices in the classroom and children being able to bring their own. Think about it, you're in a classroom and you have the latest little gadget, because the school system has said, this is how we're going to go, and what's going to be provided is the minimum, because of the cost. You have this child with this, who can do so much more and access so much more. Quite frankly, when they go home, they may not have any access at all. Folks go, well, everybody is connected. Well, that's not true. In Montgomery County, there are places where you can't get access just because of where you live. They can go to the library. Well, you have to have the transportation to get to the library. People just do not understand that not everybody is at the same place they are. That playing field has to be leveled in education and folks have to be held accountable.

Public education is under attack by the government and that's from our president to our present governor that I'm speaking to, and every little thing

that they can, they put in place unfunded mandates. The Governor this year says, "I'm going to give raises to teachers, 2 percent." It was only a small portion of teachers, and all the other employees in the district were left saying, "What about me?" You can't just do that. The county, the residents, had to come up with funds for us to help support the rest of the folks in the district who have not had raises in three years. It's those kinds of things that just set public education up to fail. Again, follow the money. The corporations who will want to come in and take over the school systems, which right now the State of Virginia has in place, have no plan as to what they will do when they take over failing schools. I have challenged them: "What's the plan?" And it's "Well, we don't really know." What's the plan? "Well, it may be that we have to do some funding." I'm like, "Why not put the funds in public education right now, instead of coming in and say we're going to take it over?" Quite frankly, when your buddy who has the corporation, who's going to do to public education much like they've done to the prison system, they will be making the money and we will end up with another separate but unequal system. It may not look black and white like it did before, but it will be separate and unequal.

Jamison: You're speaking a lot to the structural inequalities that have become visible to most of us. As you think forward, you know, 10 years from now, or 20 years from now, what would be the vision you hope to see here in Montgomery County and the different roles of leaders to get there?

Franklin: Well, first of all, I would like to see the elected boards reflect the community. Education would be a no brainer, plain and simple. We need to pay teachers, we need to build facilities, we need to offer courses. We need to expose our children to as much diversity as we possibly can. It would be this is what we do here in Montgomery County.

Of course, always, the color of someone's skin, their birthplace would not matter, as long as they are productive citizens. To make sure they're productive citizens, we should put as much in place as we can in the educational system to help them get there. We have a very diverse county. For as long as I've been here, which is all of my life, it's been Christiansburg, Blacksburg, Shawsville, and Riner, very different communities, all wonderful communities. That divide that's there between us, I would like somehow to have folks believe that everyone is being treated the same in each one of those places in the community. That goes to some of what the supervisors

are doing now. They have community dialogues in each one of the areas, but they need to really listen to what the folks are saying they need.

Then again, as a county elected official, you still have to take in the whole, what's going to be best for the whole county. That may not be, quite frankly, what's best for Blacksburg or best for Riner. You have to look at the big picture and then communicate that and have folks engaged in that conversation, so they understand why you're doing things. You're never going to make everyone happy, and folks who go around trying to make everyone happy, I have watched, and they just make a mess of it. You have to do your best. You have to do the best you can. That's what I would envision. I would like to have my kids say they want to come back to Montgomery County to live. At this point, that's not happening.

Jamison: To get to that vision, do you see, in your many roles, partnerships that haven't happened yet but are sort of ripe for the picking, or potential relationship building you see between organizations, between community groups? Do you see, as your role as a leader, things that just need someone to step up and begin to do them?

Franklin: Absolutely, and it can't be just someone willing to step up and do it. This has to be a plan, if we as a county want to be a true county and have everyone engaged and involved at some level. Again, "everyone" is a pie in the sky thing, but to have a number of folks in the county engaged, other than the usual, then we have to put funds into it. We have to make sure that employers are willing to let their employees be able to have the day off with pay, to be able to engage in conversations, to be able to attend meetings, so that they do have a say and they are hearing how decisions are being made. Those are key, because folks don't understand when you're tied to a job, then you're tied to that job and you just can't leave but every so often, if at all, to say I want to be a part of this discussion. It's going to take some buy-in to be allowed to do it by their employers and that's huge. I mean, that is huge to have employers understand I need to go to my child's school not because there's a problem or there's a teacher's conference, but I just need to go to spend a couple hours just to be there, and not penalize me for that.

Those are the types of things, because I get so tired of folks saying, "Well the parent wasn't here, the parent couldn't go and that means they don't care." It means they care enough to have a job to support their families. They can't do

both and if they were doing the other then you'd be calling them something else.

There are lots of different levels, but there has to be a plan. There has to be funds, or the Chamber of Commerce needs to come together and say, folks, think about allowing your employees one day a year, let them break it down into two hours intervals. That's eight hours, eight or 10 hours, depending on what the shift might be, so they can be a part of community. If they're truly engaged, then they're really working, because it happened with me. And if someone says we really want this person to really be here, write a letter, and when it's received by the employer, "OK, we're going to allow you a week off to be a part of this process, to go to this conference to learn about community building or better ways that we educate our children." It takes planning. It will have to be planned, deliberate, not just, well, it will happen.

Hodges: I guess this is sort of the same question for two different groups. First, how do you incentivize the employers to actually be concerned about what's going on in the community? The second question is, how do you incentivize the people that are publicly elected officials to care about these particular issues that we've talked about in the community? How do you incentivize employers who seem to be concerned about the bottom line essentially and how do you incentivize our publicly elected officials who also seem to be concerned about the bottom line?

Franklin: First, for the employers. We hear, "We don't have folks, we don't have a workforce coming out of our public schools ready to walk in to do the jobs that we need them to do." So, if you let the parents be more involved with what's going on with their children, with what's going on with public education, then maybe they will also understand, "Wait a minute, my child needs to be in the Advanced Placement classes. They can do a whole lot more than this." Or, "my child is sitting in this classroom and what I'm seeing in the classroom is there are too many kids for the teacher to truly be able to teach them all."

The elected officials have to understand, you have to put the money there to do it. Now as far as public education in Montgomery County, I can't do anything but praise the supervisors here for stepping up and doing what they have done to cover the gaps on the federal and state levels. I don't have any qualms with them, except when they think they run the school system.

Then it's like, "No, you just fund it, you don't run it." We have to have those conversations from time to time.

When you say, "they don't seem to care," that again goes back to what I said before. There's so many dynamics that go on when these decisions are being made about your insurance ratings, your funding ratings, how this will affect this, how this will affect that. People say they're not really listening to community, but there are also laws and regulations that come into play, too.

For businesses, have folks go to the Board of Supervisors meeting, a town council meeting, just like we have students who come and they get extra credit. OK? You go to a board of supervisors meeting, a school board meeting, town council meeting and you come back and show that you've been there, just like the students have to do, and you get an extra hour off on a Friday. Those types of things to encourage folks to be engaged in the process, in the decision-making process and to help educate the community. It just won't happen by itself.

If I wasn't an elected official, I might think a different way. Because I am, and because I know how things can occur, folks feel we do not listen to a word they said. That's not necessarily the case and those are some of the hardest decisions that I've ever had to make. A lot of times, it's only part of the community and that's one of the things that I've had to remind folks on my board, when they say well where are they at, we didn't hear them. Well they're working, they're taking care of their kids, or they don't have a ride to this meeting at this time of night. Their voices are out there, but just because they're not in front of you doesn't mean you cannot hear them. Again, it goes back to community deliberately putting systems in place where citizens can be involved.

Jamison: As I listen to you, I'm also hearing a need to build across multiple partners the recognition of the importance of building community.

Franklin: Yes.

Jamison: It sounds to me, as I listened to your many examples and what you see out there as pressing needs that part of the challenge, is that, for example, the employers maybe don't recognize their potential role in making a community better, which then in turn might become better for their business, providing them with the people and the steps and the things that

they need to grow and build and thrive as well. To that end, what are some of the other things that we might be able to do to help elevate that notion of community, to build across those boundaries of community? Dialogue on Race, I think, is a great example of one of these things you do. Is there something else you see out there that might help do that?

Franklin: Well, I tell folks these days, I can't wait to retire so I can go to work. Because when you are tied to a job for eight to 10 hours a day, that limits things that you would like to do. There are lots and lots of potentials out there. We have folks who fell through the cracks. This is one thing I haven't spoken about, but I always say, "Once you say it, you have to do it." We have folks who, quite frankly, went through our educational system and for whatever reason did not get the education they needed to be able to survive in the world that we have now. It used to be that a high school education, when I came through, it could get you a good job and you would stay there forever, have a pension and life would be good. It's a different world that we live in now. There are folks out there who are truly, truly struggling and I would love to have some retraining. Some of it even goes back to the basics of reading and math skills that folks who have brilliant minds, but don't have the ability to be able to use them. Just simple things like that. I mean, literacy volunteers on steroids, I guess, would be something where there's not a stigma, I need some help with these areas to help make my life better. That will help build people's confidence to be able to do other things.

I want to hit on a point that you talked about with employers and hoping that they would understand, to be able to let their employees be more engaged. It also builds morale. I work with a lot of people. We walk to the door, we're like, argh, I hate being here. Those of us who have been there for a while before the world changed, it used to be a fun place to come to work, as fun as work could be in a factory. You enjoyed coming to work and you had a better relationship with the people that you worked with because you didn't have all the stressors of, we lost half of our workforce, for example. The workload may not be where it was before, but there's still a workload, with a much older workforce, and this is not just my facility, that you're trying to beat that production out at a higher level, and it's just not going to happen.

There's a lot of overtime and a lot of, constantly, "have you got the numbers, have you got the numbers?" That orientation has got to go, that has got to go. It wears on people. They'll say, "In the U.S., our production is higher

than it's ever been." But it's on the back of those who are left in the plants and even the offices to get that same amount of work out that two or three people once did. While the corporations are making lots and lots of money, the C.E.O.s are making 400 times more than what the folks out on the floor pushing the things out are doing, and that's just wrong. That's one of those big places where we need to get things back in balance, but the morale is a huge issue. Helping folks understand, we want you to be a part of this community because we are a part of this community, too, that will go a long way.

Chapter 8: Brad Stephens / Carolyn Zelikow

Brad Stephens, Director Co-Lab and Lead Planner of CityWorks (X)po (at time of interview)

Carolyn Zelikow, Associate Director of National Programs at the Aspen Institute and Program Director and Founder of the Hometown Summit

Date of Interview: November 6, 2017

Interviewers: Sarah Lyon-Hill, Vera Smirnova

Sarah Lyon-Hill: First I would like to hear from you about the work you've done with community development. For Brad, particularly with Big Lick SOUP (Supporting Outstanding Urban Projects) and CityWorks (X)po and for Carolyn, with your work with Tom Tom in Charlottesville and at the Aspen Institute.

Brad Stephens: Absolutely. Big Lick SOUP is what I like to refer to as an “act of creative theft,” which is my favorite kind of creativity. It is a model that was developed in Detroit. I have been working with some folks down here at Virginia Tech actually on innovative change processes and I decided well, I should probably do something. SOUP was the magic introduction for that effort and it kind of started me on the path to community development. What I want to share about it is just how it blew us away, the community support that we received, both from a planning perspective and otherwise. It really reinforced for me that Roanoke was a welcoming place that was looking for interesting ideas. That was the kind of work I started that led many other projects to happen. I helped them with CityWorks (X)po and now I am leading CityWorks (X)po, which traditionally has been a conference focused on placemaking and community development. It was started by local social entrepreneur Ed Walker. It's been around for seven years and is focused on big ideas for better places. That has really been an exciting project. We decided to branch out this year.

This is my life's work now, as the director or lead planner. I make my own

title, so it is whatever I decide to call myself on any given day. We're trying to figure out what comes next. We have our own podcast, *Big Ideas for Better Places*. We have our annual gathering. We have a team focused on leveraging those ideas and turning them into action. We just had our first youth (X)po this past weekend and it was a fantastic time. The youth, I am not supposed to say children or kids, did amazing things. It was a great day. We have really exciting plans for the future that involve trying to figure out where we stand in thought leadership, in exploring where the second wave of placemaking and more generally, community development will go in the future. How do we marry this idea of being cool and innovative in activating populations and spaces? How do we create something that is meaningful and lasting and sustainable, that creates change for all members of the community?

Carolyn Zelikow: I kind of have two hats. My day job is at the Aspen Institute, which is a global policy center think tank, headquartered in Washington, D.C. But between us here, what I'm most interested in and I'm most excited about is a project that I do on my nights and weekends, which is running the Hometown Summit, which is America's biggest conference for small cities. It takes place in Charlottesville, Virginia. You can check out Tomtomfest.com/hometown to learn more about that. Hometown Summit is a gathering of more than 500 innovators, from more than 75 cities, talking about topics ranging from local food to public health to financial tools. It's part of the Tom Tom Founders Festival, which is a week-long celebration of inclusive innovation in small cities, that includes more than 110 events and will welcome 25,000 participants this April to Charlottesville. It has seeded nearly \$3 million in investments since its inception in 2012. So that keeps me busy, between those two things.

Vera Smirnova: What do you see as “community placemaking”? What is “community placemaking” for you? Can you provide some specific examples of how your work engages with “community placemaking”?

Stephens: What a great question. For me, I often come back to this little saying that I try to ingrain into my work, of “creating places that work for people and people that work for places,” in that really, what we're trying to do is to create a place. I think traditional placemaking is about activating public space, just to take us back a bit, to make sure that when we have a public space, it's useful and created in such a way that it's welcoming and it adds value to the community that it's a part of. I think that we're now reaching

this time when we're realizing that places are the people that live in them. How do we work closely together? How do we marry this continued interest in the built environment, but also include conversations about equity, about what the future holds and these big conversations that we know are coming? How do we marry this into this placemaking conversation, which is really in the end about people?

Zelikow: I have kind of a twist on placemaking, which is actually born of the fact that I'm not formally trained in this field. I kind of riffed off of the word placemaking. One of the things that Hometown tries to cultivate is a distinctiveness of place. America, for its entire history, has had really rich regional cultures, from the Delta blues to the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. But I think now, often when you're driving through cities, it's a very similar landscape of commercial development and chain stores, that look exactly the same in Minnesota as they do in Mississippi. There's something lost in that. There's cultural capital, but there's also tourism value to it.

We're trying to explore how towns can develop an inventory of design themes and of materials, and how they can develop stories about the personalities and institutions that make their communities special and unique. In addition to convening conversations about those issues and offering some playbooks and expertise, we're also launching some of our own content as well. We have some notes from last year that are available online.

This coming year, we will have a cohort system for cities, where we will spotlight 16 small cities in particular. It's this package that they engage in, part of that is being featured in a podcast, getting a case study in our annual brochure, which is distributed to 20,000 people, and getting a profile on our website, which has half a million visits per year. It's really trying to tell the stories about what makes Akron, Ohio, or Erie, Pennsylvania, or Blacksburg, Virginia, really different from any other small city that you might drive through, on your way to Atlanta or whatever. It's kind of the cool new frontier of placemaking, but I think it's a nascent field, so there is lots to discover there in terms of what's practical and what has impact.

Lyon-Hill: Based on your definitions of placemaking, a lot of that does have to deal with people, who they are, the uniqueness that comes with the community and the diverse voices that are within that. How do you build

inclusive partnerships when you're building this whole concept of placemaking?

Stephens: I don't know. I was telling Andy [Morikawa] that when I'm prepping for the podcast that we do, I always have a list of questions. One of the ones that I never include, but I always wind up asking, because it always becomes clear that it's important, is how do we create shared vision? I think that that is what this really gets to the basis of. Speaking from personal experience in Roanoke and as someone who didn't grow up there, I think it's really difficult that when I think of Roanoke, I think of a cohesive whole. I do think of my neighborhood, but most of the time I am thinking about us as a city of 90,000-plus folks, with 300,000 in the metro area. But I know that there are these folks, particularly minority communities, that really for them, their community is much smaller than that. They don't think much about Roanoke as a city, and so having a shared vision in that context becomes very difficult. Those are conversations that I struggle with daily. We're constantly playing that game of how do we get a diverse and inclusive group of people here. We fail at it every single time we try, but it is that crucial question that we're trying to deal with, moving forward.

Zelikow: Yeah, I think engaging folks across socio-economic lines and lines of identity is really tough and is a challenge for anybody who works in the public space. I wouldn't say that we have really conquered that either. One thing that we do, there are two parts to this. On the planning end, I have learned from the founder of Tom Tom Festival, Paul Beyer, who's my close collaborator. It's really essential to me to make multiple avenues and channels for people to engage, so that's everything from social media, to sending out emails to thousands of people asking for their input, to hosting public meetings on weekends and weeknights and times that work for different people based on their schedules. This is to get the community to help steer and also feel ownership of what you're creating. If you're doing a project that's in the civic space or in the public space, it is just flat out not going to work if people feel like it's being imposed upon them by some alien entity.

We've seen that a lot in Charlottesville and I've seen that a lot in other communities—very well-intentioned things that just didn't have the engagement process built into it. I would say that even with the Hometown Summit, I had my ideas for how it would be, what the programming would

look like and the topics I wanted to discuss. It takes extra work to do that community engagement and it's not always clear why you're doing it, because I don't want to ask people's opinion if I'm not going to listen to them. But in fact, just the very act of going through those steps changed the way that I was thinking about possible programming. It really resulted in a better and more relevant convening in the end.

The other way that you build inclusion is in the types of events that you offer, which is doing stuff that appeals to the people that you are trying to include. Tom Tom Festival does these big block parties in public parks and we're really careful with our musical choices, that it's not all country or indie bluegrass, which is very popular in Central Virginia, but not popular with everybody. We try to include musical genres that are appealing across the spectrum of society. Similarly, we do things like entrepreneurial competitions where lots of people have a business idea and we support them in getting the gumption to go out and tell their community about it. That's a broadly open public forum and it really does draw people from all different walks of life.

Our first winner, back in 2012 when our crowd-funded pitch night was first launched, was a woman who was opening a bodega in her neighborhood, which is a lower-income neighborhood. She was an African-American woman and it's been a successful small business. A lot of what we do are these "seminar talky things" and that's not where everybody wants to engage. Having a variety of programming that speaks to people's interests in different ways might also be a starting point for that. It's a really good question.

Stephens: Just to build on that a little bit, I think that trust is hugely important. A lot of times, the reason that we need to rebuild these things is because they've been broken by something that was harmful in the past. That distrust lingers with good reason, often because those harmful things are still happening. I think that the more that someone can be outside of the norm, like the work that you guys do, Carolyn, the better. I think if the city of Charlottesville itself had wanted to hold those things, that conversation would be very different than what you guys are having. Being a new voice that can build new trust, in a way that Charlottesville can't, because you don't have the baggage, will be very powerful in these places as well.

Zelikow: That's a really good point. The university is a huge partner for Tom Tom and we just wouldn't exist without it, but we hear from people all the

time that it's really nice to see that this is happening outside of the university. There are just a lot of things that feel very like, "Now we will descend from our ivory tower to provide you with leadership and guidance and to organize you to your own best benefit." Anyway, it's a good point. A lot of it involves undergraduate students interviewing people who are of low income and who live in public housing. Nobody knocked on my door when I was growing up saying, "Hey we want to survey you." It's kind of an imposition and so it's an interesting line to walk.

Smirnova: What specific strategies do your community development initiatives employ, to avoid marginalization of racial or economic minorities, in the places where you work?

Stephens: The broad picture of what my work is, based around Roanoke, is trying to provide are platforms for folks to explore interesting and new ideas for how to create change. We have not quite figured out this question. Our answer to it, thus far, has often been personal invites, working through trusted colleagues. But again, those have been very piecemeal and not particularly effective. The best practices have eluded us and Roanoke is among the most segregated cities in the country. It's very difficult to bridge those barriers. I personally have some African-American friends, but they are so busy that for me to ask anything of them becomes immediately an imposition. They are so engaged in important work, all the time. In and of itself, it's almost like by trying to do that, you're making them take a step back and that you're interfering with important work which someone else is doing. But I don't know. Carolyn, I hope you have a better answer.

Zelikow: That's really well said. There are often the usual suspects, with any kind of delineated community, like the African-American community. These people get invited again and again and again and they are on 20 boards and they don't want to do more board service. There are a lot of well-intentioned organizations that aren't necessarily funded or that don't have the resources to do this kind of outreach work. They just throw up their hands at a certain point. But I have seen that in Hometown and Tom Tom, there are a couple of things that we can do to avoid marginalization.

First of all, all of our panels and presentations are representative of the demographics of this country. Similarly, we don't do topics unless they are of relevance to all Americans. If you can't find a speaker, who is a person

of color or a woman, to talk about machine learning or advances in biotechnology, it's either (a) you're not doing your work or (b) those sectors are not really relevant to broad economic prosperity, so you should not be talking about them. So that's really shaped a lot of our work this year.

Finally, we're working—we haven't quite gotten the money yet, but we're working—to get a fellowship for under-represented populations. It was an issue last year. A lot of people who are in city government or who can afford to work in the nonprofit sector do tend to be more advantaged and do tend to be white. That's clearly an incomplete conversation and perspective, so we're trying to do some things to engineer that. to be a more future-looking group.

Stephens: I just want to piggyback on that a little bit and say that it's difficult because every population is different in some ways. I think that there's been a lot of effort and focus. We did our Youth (X)po this past week. We were just kicking off and a woman who is near and dear to me and works heavily with Hispanic population came up and whispered in my ear, "You don't have a Hispanic speaker." I said a bad word that we won't comment on here. I screwed up. But it's fascinating because there's no one strategy that's going to reach all of those populations. The Hispanic population is in many ways, much more difficult to mobilize than the African-American population. The immigrant and the English-as-a-second-language populations, even more difficult to mobilize perhaps than that. The questions here become endless.

I do think that there is this line that we walk in terms of, on one hand you have to be inclusive and you have to do these things because otherwise your work has no value, but on the other hand, you could also spend all of your time trying to be inclusive and not get into the work. So, if you guys can figure it out, please let us know.

Lyon-Hill: There were two things that I heard that I found really interesting. One is this idea of, how do we develop civic partnership and civic participation among all of these different groups? Part of it is, does everyone feel the impetus to play a role in the civic dialogue? On the flip side of that, you have these elephants in the room, these larger players that have always played this role and have always been around the table. You don't necessarily want to marginalize them over the long run, you don't want to play the

opposite effect. But how do you make room for other people, amongst the larger number of similar groups?

Zelikow: I detected two good questions actually. One was how do you get everyone to play together and then the second, is how do you bring fresh faces to the conversation. To the first one, and this may be a little controversial, Tom Tom and Hometown typically do not focus on the “pain points” directly. We don’t typically do sessions—there are exceptions to this—on things like “What should reparations look like?” “How can we eliminate racism in public office?” Or even questions that seem more benign but tend to rouse a lot of violent emotion, like “What does it mean to be an American?” When you ask someone a question like that, you need to be prepared to hear some things that you don’t really want to hear. That’s just the country that we live in now and have always lived in.

So instead of asking some of those questions that cue people up to get into their fighting postures, we try and frame our dialogue around the future. We were talking earlier about this issue of fear and how people’s uncertainty about the future creates kind of an illness or a malaise. It spreads into a lot of other areas of life. We feel that having conversations about the future has both a direct benefit and also offers people the opportunity to engage in a neutral space, that isn’t as laden with minefields, with baggage, and with recrimination. Then we start to value and respect each other’s opinions.

I have a friend who’s an urban planner, who did a project in Detroit. To keep the story short, she was working with high schoolers and they had millions of dollars to redesign this park. But the kids just were not cooperating. They had been burned by these “well-wishing do-gooder organizations” too many times in the past. What she did was, she brought out some of the actual materials that would be used in the park itself. Once there was that little element of play or interactivity, a lot of the energy just totally changed and people were prepared to engage and imagine together. Her wonderful phrase for it was, “When people pick up tools, they put down their fears.” That’s a little bit of the kind of learning that we incorporate in our style of dialogue.

To your second question about bringing fresh faces, it’s just something that we have to be very intentional about. For Hometown Summit, again, there’s this cohort of some 16 cities. Each city is asked to bring in and curate a

group of 15 stakeholders. We don't put this in our language, but we're actually looking for stakeholders who are under the age of 45, so still relatively young in their careers. That's kind of a mechanism to give other people an "at bat" since often, a lot of the key players in cities like, Community Foundation directors, CEOs of major employers, and city managers are over the age of 50. It is a way to give some other people a little bit of oxygen.

Stephens: I'm really intrigued by this. How do I want to say this? My own theory of change operates in much the same place that yours does, I think, in terms of having a somewhat tangential take on things in order to facilitate conversation. It was very interesting that in this past year of the (X)po, I had a couple of our committee members that pushed me on that. It made for some very uncomfortable conversations and it was a huge growing experience. I'm sure I didn't handle it the way that I probably should have. The situation was, I was being called out on my white privilege, for not speaking forcefully enough about things. It was a very uncomfortable place, especially since I don't know how I feel about it, even to this point. But it was important that we articulate that on some level and make it clear.

What I want to leave folks with is that we want to get a bunch of different, disparate groups together, no matter what, whether that's different ethnicities or different nonprofits or whatever, that don't usually work together. Providing them all something that they value is perhaps the most crucial part and recognizing that what you value in it may not be what they value in it.

Going back to Big Lick SOUP. This is a very simple thing. People come in and they put \$10 in a pot. They hear some presentations, they vote on one, they eat some food, they go home and they have funded a project. But I think that there are people on our committee that their favorite part is the fact that we get to represent every restaurant. There is another one, that we get to break bread together. For another, the funding part is the most important part. For another, it is that we're fostering innovation. I think that we can all come together and this will be the same project, but we're also finding something different of value in there. I think that that's an important thing. There's a breakdown of that, that you are probably not going to have the same team for every project because not every project has the same value propositions to it. That's very powerful.

I agree with intentionality of getting these new folks in the room. It's a key difficulty. Roanoke is a very conservative place in some ways. We vote Democratic, but it's a very conservative place. There are a lot of rich white dudes hanging out in Roanoke, on the boards of places. There's very much intentionality about that. You can see where we fall short in some ways, in terms of, you often wind up with that one young person, that one African American on the board and there's nothing more uncomfortable than that situation.

Lyon-Hill: You actually touched on a really good point, this whole idea of value proposition, the proposition for partners. When you approach a lot of traditional community development, it's very much about tangible construction, like, "I am going to develop our main streets to make them into a better sense of place," or "I'm going to develop a farmer's market." It's very tangible and you can get people on board really easily that way. You can disagree with me here, but it seems like with placemaking, it is far more long term, it's far more dynamic, and you really need to keep your partners going for that long term. How do keep those partnerships going and lasting?

Stephens: You start with tricking them. I say that in jest, but I do think there's some truth to that. You get that part to the table by telling them, "We're going to build a downtown square" and then you're going to table, but what you really want them to do is build the space "so that we have a place where we can have conversations after it's done." I think that once you get them in there, you can spin things a certain way to get people to buy in and then you hope that when they see the outcome of what they've done, that they understand the true value of that money and investment or time or whatever they put into it.

You also understand that your partners will probably change over the course of a project. Just from a very basic standpoint, if you're building a town square, you start with a construction person and that person is not going to be your partner, probably, after a little bit. Then you move on to the people who want to show movies on the side of buildings, downtown. As you grow and you shift, it's OK to move and to have different partners. You also hope that the ones that you came with, that they still understand and appreciate what's happening, even if they're not playing the same role in it that they once did. But just trick them.

Zelikow: Yeah, I would totally agree with Brad. I will actually pick up on something from your previous comment, that different people come to your product or your offering for different reasons. Sometimes, the kind of lean startup “value prop” kind of methodology is almost a little over determined, a little over engineered. We’ve been getting this all the time at Tom Tom Festival because it’s a smorgasbord, it’s like everything.

We don’t have a lot of focus, honestly, but that’s part of what makes it interesting. It brings a lot of different kinds of people to the projects in city events. I think being open to a little bit of vagueness and being willing to stand up for a little bit of ambiguity is okay. So long as the core business functions are working, people are coming, or whatever that might be for your initiative, it’s okay to say, “we don’t know exactly what this is” and “we’re just going to use this tagline for the time being.” What you just said about being willing to evolve, I’m thinking there’s this line in *Annie Hall*, the Woody Allen movie, “I read somewhere that sharks die if they stop moving.” And *Annie Hall* jokes, “I guess we’ve got a dead shark on our hands,” talking about her relationship.

I think donors, partners, staff, are all inspired by the feeling that you’re still growing. You don’t have to be a startup to have that kind of “learner’s mentality” and that sense of adventure and change. Being, on the one hand, critical of where you can grow and what you can improve, but at the same time, being kind of outside of the box and whimsical about trying new things that might just bring some freshness to your project is important and actually kind of fun.

Stephens: There was a Community Voices presentation two or three years ago with Dr. Mike Friedlander, who’s the head of the Virginia Tech-Carillon Research Institute at Roanoke, and Liz Lerman who is a world-renowned dance choreographer. I was just captivated. They had this program where these dancers came in and danced around people getting M.R.I.s. Afterwards, I went up to Dr. Friedlander, who is a world-famous researcher. I said, “What is your hope for the outcome of this.?” He replied, “I don’t know. It just seemed like the right thing to do.” I was like, “Yes!” That’s what we should all be aiming for in some ways.

Zelikow: Sometimes, we know more than we know. There are all kinds of things like these. You guys may have heard about nature therapy or nature

baths. We don't really know why, but people just need to be out in the fresh air and sunshine and it's really good for you. Sometimes you just have instincts for what works, and you may not be able to put it into a grant proposal, but that shouldn't stop you from going for it.

Stephens: If there are any funders willing to be flexible, we're here.

Zelikow: Who wants to underwrite whimsy and randomness?

Smirnova: Going back to your point about tricking the partners to be engaged in community change, how do you prevent those partners from taking some kind of financial advantage, over the long term? How do you prevent commodification of community change processes?

Stephens: So, I'm of two minds on this, as I am with most things. On some level, I want to say that's fine. On another level I want to say, obviously that's not fine. I kind of want to walk this middle line where, right now if we need to commodify community change to make it happen, then that's what we do, even though in the long run we know that we don't want that to be the case.

So, in the same way that the Nature Conservancy in the environmental world is doing fascinating work, it's very much corporatized. It's still vitally important work that's happening right now, but we still need to support Greenpeace who's looking to create a whole new world view of these things. I think that it's this age-old question. If somebody wants to do something beneficial, "I hate to throw the baby out with the bathwater." But then again, I want to make a living. I have a child now, so I have to pay for that child.

Zelikow: Yeah so, we encounter this a bit. Tom Tom is very sponsorship driven, as is Hometown. Hometown is more supported by foundations, but even foundations have their priorities, which may not be in line with your communities' priorities. My thought for this is what has been a guiding thing for Tom Tom is a little bit to your point about incentives, to have your incentives aligned so that if you truly betray your value to the community, you'll go out of business. There's this concept now of benefit corporations, of B corps, and those aren't just kind of the company that extracts diamonds and enslaves people and then donates to charity. It's trying to elevate the kind of company that has built into its DNA, into its products, a really high degree of stewardship and responsibility.

So, I think Tom Tom and Hometown are a little bit like that. People have a very keen sense of when something becomes artificial and fake. It's actually one of the reasons why we've held back from taking our events to other cities. Folks know when they're being sold a bill of goods. I think if people ever felt like, "Wow, this is just like a Nike store here in our public park," they would just stop coming to our event and we would go out of business.

Lyon-Hill: What are the biggest challenges in trying to promote community change through festivals, since they are one-offs? I'm thinking of CityWorks (X)po in Roanoke and Tom Tom in Charlottesville. How do you keep those discussions sustained over time and translated into action?

Stephens: Again, I'll start with an "I don't know." Which is why, in some ways we, as CityWorks, are moving away from that to some degree. I think we'll probably still continue to do those things, but the focus will move on to things like fellowships and things that get people engaged and provide them with resources. But really, I don't know if you will agree with this Carolyn, but I think that for me, the festivals are largely about energy, and let me be clear, I hate festivals. I go into other people's festivals and I stay there like an hour and I'm like, "I can't do this."

Zelikow: I know, I hate music festivals.

Stephens: But you just hope that energy comes out of it, you hope that networking comes out of it. You hope that—for me, coming again from this background of "we don't know"—that the answers will come for the questions that we have. We hope that someone has a conversation that sparks something new. Even this morning, we were talking about a question about regulation, and what I was left with, after the conversation, is why regulation is always what we rely on, all the time.

Surely there are other tools that we can put out there. You hope that in the long run, what we want to see are the new tools. You hope that by bringing people together and by putting new and interesting ideas in front of them, you spark them to do something that's even more new and interesting. But we know that that doesn't happen 99.8 percent of the time and so you really celebrate your successes and you also find some way to do other work as well.

Zelikow: Events have their limitations. Even with my day job at the Aspen

Institute, we are primarily a convener. We bring people together. We don't actually produce a lot of original research in the way that the Brookings Institution does or other think tanks do. We struggle constantly to persuade our partners and donors that we're having an impact. It's very hard to show, "Oh well, someone invented the airplane because they came to my festival." There are probably other contributing factors.

That being said, events are good for certain kinds of things and I would actually reframe events a little, as media or as live content rather than like a party per se. Not that parties aren't great. I'm all about partying. I think of our events as almost an extension of a broader goal, which is to pollinate ideas and to create a space for people to imagine the order and mission of their communities in different ways. That's actually not something that direct service nonprofits can really do. And you do need to give people a little bit of space and room to play. If you know what you're trying to do with your event, it can be the right approach. I do also see a lot of nonprofits who are saddled with hosting an annual or semi-annual convening. It's a ton of work and it's a lot of money to put these things on. It's not necessarily directly serving the kind of change that they're trying to create.

Smirnova: So, what are new exciting ideas or new projects that you're thinking about or planning to do? Or maybe, how would you approach your project differently? What would you do? what would you change?

Stephens: Well, I'll share the kind of the direction that we're headed in. What I would like to see is CityWorks taking on both, ramping up our action team, so that this would be essentially operating as a civic innovation lab, fostering new ideas in Roanoke, and helping hopefully at eventually just promoting other people's ideas. At first, we probably have to prime the pump for imaginative capacity, which is not particularly strong in Roanoke right now. The second part of what I'm aiming for is on a national level, to do a much smaller convening/work gathering of some of the thought leaders, in this frame, to produce something along the lines of a report or a vision statement, for what the future of this work should look like. I think this is wildly ambitious of me, but I think it is one of the roles that we can play, moving forward.

Zelikow: My new projects are not as clearly defined. I pretty much have my hands full, trying to bring this thing together, to be frank with you.

I think, ultimately, where we're trying to go with the city cohorts is the beginning of an attempt to form kind of a fellowship or a coalition among a certain kind of visionary and creative leader, in smaller cities. It's kind of having a fellowship component. We're really trying to increase the amount of year-round content that we create through these profiles, case studies and commissioned research. That's kind of a new thing.

As well, I'm a huge magazine nerd. I have the probably ill-advised dream of creating a print journal or an almanac, called *The Hometown Journal* or *The Hometown Almanac*. [To Brad Stephens] Don't steal that, I see you looking at me! It would be a beautifully produced celebration of art and essays and creativity, as well as some of the important policy stuff that's happening in smaller cities.

Ultimately, I don't ever see our organization becoming an advocacy organization in the sense of being a 501(c)(4) [social welfare nonprofit] or a lobbying entity. There's a lot of empty space, in terms of avenues or excuses that the little guy has, to get together and advocate or express some shared priorities. For example, in the case of the small business lobby in the United States, the Chamber of Commerce is really more representative of the interests of mid-sized firms. At this point in time, I'd like to see us offer a little bit more of a home for those ideas, without actually edging into advocating for specific policies.

Lyon-Hill: What do you see as the future of community development?

Zelikow: I love that question.

Stephens: I see this work changing, becoming more exciting, this work of what it means to be a strong community. I think that that question, in and of itself, is where the interesting work is happening right now. We did a lot of thinking as we were preparing for (X)po this year, that the world that we're in now is not the world we were in when (X)po started seven years ago. Particularly, what it means to be a better place is harder to define now, than it's ever been, I think. So, I think those conversations are what excite me and those conversations, I think, will only continue to get more difficult. But that's where the real value lies. I hope that my grandchildren find some answers to these questions. That means you have to have children, whatever you want to do.

Zelikow: So, I have some humility about answering the question about the future of community development because I'm not super steeped in the past of it. I graduated from school five years ago and I've never actually worked in these professions. I have a lot of respect for the people who do, but I do sense that the field is changing. The folks who are sitting at this table, you can't see them, but we're all pretty fresh faced, like Ariel Levy who ran the Tom Tom Festival before Ben [Ben Wilkes-Program Coordinator]. I can name a dozen people who are young and just found themselves in a space and were guided towards it. I think there's a real movement of younger people to be involved in these civic issues, even if it doesn't look like working in city government as it may have a generation or two ago. I think what they will bring with them is a more holistic and mission-driven mindset, perhaps, which is something that I think you see across other fields as well.

One of my big things is for cities to reclaim some of the key institutions that inform their growth. We were all talking about this at lunch, a few minutes ago. I think that those are the kinds of ideas that we'll see more of, in the next couple of years, especially as some of these crises in leadership and democracy continue to deepen, that will actually encourage us to be a little bit more creative and resourceful, in terms of the opportunities that we have to help each other at the local level.

PART II: EXPLORING
COMMUNITY CHANGE VIA
FOOD SYSTEMS

Chapter 9: Rick Cavey

Rick Cavey, Organic Farmer, Retired Naval Officer

Date of Interview: September 21, 2016

Interviewers: Andy Morikawa, D'Elia Wernecke, Mario Khreiche, Dayo Omosa

Andy Morikawa: One of the themes, Rick, that we've explored with guests in this series is that of transitions, going from one thing to another, from one state to another. I'm wondering if you'd share with us some of the transitions that have brought you from being a Navy diver and an officer, to Grayson County as an organic farmer.

Rick Cavey: Yes, it's a question that when people hear about my background, I get often. It's not a traditional career path to be a Navy diver and then become an organic farmer. It's not something that you can find in too many stories of careers. I guess, for me, I've always looked at my life as chapters. My first chapter was the military, which I loved very much and wouldn't give up for anything. When I came to the end of my career in the military, I looked forward to doing something totally different. There's an old story about a man who wants to do something different in his life. He's a sailor and he puts an anchor on his shoulder and he walks inland. When he gets to a point where somebody looks at him and says, "Hey, what's that on your shoulder?" he drops his anchor and says "I've arrived where I want to be now. It's something totally different and unfamiliar." Organic farming was our next chapter and I've just had a wonderful time with it and enjoyed it as much as I did my first chapter.

Mario Khreiche: Were there any lessons that you took from the Navy, that in any way helped you with the next chapters in your life?

Cavey: Absolutely everything. I can tell you the number one thing that helped me transition from the military to organic farming was the community. Military, in and of itself, is a community that relies upon each part of that organization to be at its best. Farming is the same thing. When we got to this region and started farming, we were on a little island. We were doing it all

by ourselves. Right away, I realized that that was wrong and that we needed to engage with the community. We needed to help set the stage, to help set the environment around us, to not only accept us, but also to embrace this organic farming idea. I used a lot of the experiences I had in the military concerning how to influence people, how to motivate people, how to, and you'll hear me say this a lot, how to allow myself to live the life I had scripted by setting the stage around me. The military does that, much the same way. They deploy with the ability to set an area that they can control. I don't mean that in a nefarious way. Through my own actions, I mean it for good. I have these desires. I have these motivations. Others share them. I try to foster a community that shares these ideas and set the stage, so to speak, for us to be able to do what we want to do, which was to farm organically.

D'Elia Wernecke: I was struck by your choice of the word “adventure” in describing the title of your talk: “Adventures of Community Engagement, Building Consensus by Tapping Individual Motivation.” Can you explain why you may have chosen to use that word and provide an example or two describing any memorable adventure in community engagement.

Cavey: Absolutely. Adventure is what my life was all about in the military. I had the pleasure of joining the military at a time when there was a lot of peace in the world. We were able to train and do things that in war time can be harder to accomplish. One of the things I was able to do was to become what's called a saturation diver. It's a specialty form of diving. It's for real deep diving and I had the pleasure of walking on the bottom of the ocean, nearly a thousand feet deep. At the time I did that, more men had walked on the moon than had walked on the bottom of the ocean, at the depth of a thousand feet. When I say adventure, I'm telling you I had a great time. At times, I would wake up and say, “I can't believe they're paying me to do this! They could just stop paying me tomorrow and I wouldn't stop coming to work.” So yes, it's adventures. All of them helped build, helped me understand and grow the skills that I needed to do what we're doing now, which is building community and building agriculture from the ground up.

Dayo Omosa: I know that you have been involved in some peacebuilding initiatives in the past. Please share some of your peacebuilding strategies. I know that you were in Iraq and also served during Hurricane Katrina in the United States.

Cavey: I think you were probably referring to the Partnership for Peace missions that we did with the former Soviet bloc nations. At the time of the breakup of the U.S.S.R., many of the affected countries, such as Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Romania, were really searching for a way to govern themselves and the predominant sense was that they wanted to be a democracy. What they cast about for was an association with an organization that could give them that legitimacy and they turned to NATO. In order to serve alongside NATO and to be part of the NATO community, you have to be able to prove that your military can support NATO on missions. So, we were ambassadors for NATO. We were assigned by the State Department. We would go to these countries and we would conduct diving and mine recovery exercises. These were considered “softball type” exercises. They were not offensive. They were beneficial to the community, e.g., clearing harbors so that they can they could get trade in and out that had been reduced badly because of some of the rebellion.

We just had a wonderful time as ambassadors, sharing our know-how and culture with them. They were ambassadors to us, as well, teaching us about their culture. I remember at one point, driving through the countryside of Bulgaria, I noticed these concrete buildings on all the hillsides and I said, “What are those?” The interpreter said, “Well, they are pillboxes.” I said, “Pillboxes? What were they for?” He said, “For you!” He said they had been constructed as defensive positions to fight against the West if the West ever invaded Bulgaria. This was the kind of propaganda with which they lived under Soviet rule. We were there to show that we were just like them. We wanted to go out and dive and work hard and have a great meal after work and, well of course, go to nightclubs, too, but that was another side.

Khreiche: When you were out there in these countries and on your travels, did you have an interest in farming? Did you look around to learn how the people cared for each other, cared for themselves? What they grew? What they ate?

Cavey: Absolutely. At that time, I hadn't thought of farming as a career. But living with my wife of nearly 30 years now, who is a chef, I had an appreciation for good food. I knew that good food came from good material, good product, good vegetables, good meat, things that were grown in a manner that respects both the environment and the crop itself. In one engagement, when we were in Albania, we were invited into a host home. It

was amazing, walking up to these former villages that had been agriculture enclaves. They produced primarily wheat and commodity crops for the Soviet Union. That crop would leave that area and go to a market. These folks would rely on their gardens in their front yards for their own food.

When the Soviet Union broke up, they now had all this land, all this equipment that was left behind. They had no logistics anymore to get wheat out, so they just began growing food for themselves. I tell you, I sat down to one of the most wonderful meals I've ever had in my life, that was cooked by a very poor family living in a hut that had no windows. There were no cars in that community. It was the best meal. A restaurant in New York City that charges \$500 a ticket couldn't have set a meal as wonderful as that was. I was just amazed at the resilience of these people and how they just took what they knew, which was how to grow, and turned it into something that made them self-supporting. They had no outside way of bringing in food. They had no grocery stores. They were growing their own food, right there. It really brought a sense home to me about independence and all that. I wanted to make sure that in "Chapter Two," when I did make that transition, that I had that kind of capability to feed myself and to support myself through even tough times, if need be.

That meal was wonderful. Then the worst thing was—not the worst, the best thing was—that because we were Americans and we were the first Americans in the country in a long, long time in Albania, three other hosts invited us to dinner that night. I had to eat three more meals just like that. It was pretty hard. By the end of the evening, I was having a hard time being gracious, but it was a wonderful experience.

Omosa: Did they ask you what you ate? Were they interested in what Americans ate? Or were they more concerned with hosting you and giving you the experience of their culture?

Cavey: They did ask why I was so amazed. They could see the joy on my face. I said, probably more than anything, I told them I'd been on the ship for the past six months and had been eating ship food and so this was like a real treat. They did ask about farming in our country and I told them that a lot of it is like what they used to have under the Soviet Union, fence line to fence line ... commodity crops. That was what a lot of farming is in America right now. There are only a few folks in some corridors in California, in small areas

around the country, who are growing crops organically for direct market sales and for consumer purchase, right there in the localities. I did have those discussions with them.

Wernecke: I'm going to switch back to community building and back to the Partnership for Peace work you did. You've worked with, and in, diverse communities with at times, I'm sure, differing or competing goals. What have been some strategies that you've used to build consensus within a group?

Cavey: I'm so glad you asked that, because this idea that there's competition between community activists and community activities and engagements is just the thing that prevents them, especially in our small rural areas. Like you just said, there is competition for funding, for the attention that you need from the municipality, from any grants and things like that, that really kind of help sustain these community engagements in their initial years. If you have 15 organizations in a small populated area like Grayson County's 1,400 people, there's only so many of that resource, so many people you can hit up for funding, so many municipalities that can support you, so many workers that can help with that. So, if you can join together, you create not only a synergy among your projects, but you also become less competitive with one another and you become more efficient.

For instance, we partnered recently with the Blue Ridge Discovery Center, which is a nonprofit. It does outdoor education and hosts the Mount Rogers Naturalist Rally every year. What we did through Grayson LandCare was say, "We want to sponsor the dinner that night. We want to have a farm-to-table dinner." It was a huge success. Now I think—unfortunately for those of us who are cooking that dinner every year—it's going to be ingrained in that effort, going forward. It just made us both a better organization, made that event a better event, by having the two of us work together in that community engagement.

Omosa: You have been working with the community for some time now and been in retirement from the Navy. If you were to go back to the Navy, what experience would you take from the community, back to the Navy?

Cavey: Maybe one thing that would be good is that I've learned the value of nutrition. I've learned the value of food and how it celebrates life, and a lot of the things that we tend to gloss over quickly, because it's inconvenient to

spend some real time and celebrate food. I can remember taking our guys on some pretty arduous adventures, where we were eating nothing more than M.R.E.s, Meals Ready to Eat. Maybe, one way is instilling in them the sense that there are initiatives out there that can help with their health and other things, by choosing a different way to eat than what you are currently doing. I know of a lot of guys I served with eat a lot of fast food and a lot of packaged food, even when they're not on duty. I would like to try to maybe change some of those habits, and add an awareness of healthy food to that mission as well.

Khreiche: Speaking on the topic of nutrition, one arguable advantage of globalization, for example, is that we get a lot of food from places elsewhere, that our climate zone might not support. They ran a study in the part of Germany where I'm from that if people only relied on the food that was there, the spectrum of nutrition that you would get would be considerably lower. Of course, there are a lot of disadvantages, too, with globalization and globalized food. For example, the impact on the planet, on cheap labor. What do you think it would take to change the way we eat on a global scale?

Cavey: I can't speak to the study. I wouldn't have any statistics on that. It does seem that there are places on the planet where that would be true. I don't know that that's necessarily true in our region. I think we could grow our own food and seasonally enough to support us. On a global scale, I agree, I could see that being a considerable challenge, using just a locally produced farming type of effort. My solution for that would be ... one of the inspiring things that I take from the industrial food system is this system that they have in place, this logistics system that they have where they can transport food around the world in hours, not days, not weeks. Fresh seafood comes from the coast and is in other countries, just six, seven, eight hours later. Seafood and other products that could spoil are treated the same way.

My solution is that local food, grown regionally, can adopt those same principles and to use a technical term, "climb on to that organization," to that efficiency, to that infrastructure that's already there, and just become part of it. We don't have to replace it. We don't have to do away with this unbelievably efficient system. We just need to be part of it. But we need to be given a fair shake in the deal. We need to have the same benefits and the same stage for success that "big ag" and big industry already have, through

the government's subsidy programs and things like that. The stage needs to be equal, for us to do that.

Wernecke: Working off that, then, what are some concrete barriers that local farmers have, where they are unable to compete with those in these markets?

Cavey: Well I can speak to just our area of land. Aggregation facilities. My farm is fortunate that we were donated a walk-in cooler. We can take food out of the garden, get it cooled down, put it in that cooler, package it, and have it for a day or two while we try to find buyers. Although we usually are searching (for buyers) a little way in advance of harvest. But then we took that next step. We said to the other farmers "There's plenty of room in that walk-in. Let's bring your food here. Bring it. Let's aggregate it here. We'll find a buyer." Instead of a buyer for one case of peppers, we will find a buyer for 15 cases of peppers. We began building on that. Two years ago, when we started this, we sold \$80,000 worth of produce out of that little aggregation facility.

The second thing was trucking it. Aggregating is one thing. Now you've got to take it someplace that's willing to buy 10 cases or a pallet full of food. Trucks are another big logistics advantage that big industry has. It's in place. It's this transportation system that's in place. There are so many empty trucks that go driving right past Highway 58 that are going back to distribution centers. Why couldn't we get into that type of hub and transport our stuff that way?

Khreiche: Do you think that could be like a "truck sheriff," or just like ride shares for people, that if you have a truck going from A to B, pick up some agricultural calls on the way?

Cavey: I call it the Veggie Uber. I think it's doable. It's using technology, using things that are already proven out there and where we've already got it. It's circulating. We're working on this dispatch type of thing, where we can go pick up food from farmers (so they don't have to deliver) and bring it to the aggregation facility and then dispatch it to restaurants and stores.

Khreiche: Because it would be good for the drivers, too, obviously. There's a way in which it could be good, and you might cut into another economy there. Sounds very interesting

Cavey: Absolutely, absolutely.

Wernecke: I believe a motto of yours is to let folks own it, like they made it. In communities, like the local farming community or military communities, what are some strategies that you've either developed or utilized, to make sure that individuals stay motivated and feel that they have ownership in decision making?

Cavey: In the military, it's really simple to get people motivated. It's called "bullets, blankets, and beans." If you can supply a soldier with good equipment, feed them a nice hot meal that's delicious, and give them a nice warm place to sleep at night, they've got all the motivation they need. It takes a bit more than I learned in the military to do that. Because I've always had this penchant to script my life and set the stage around me, I found that I needed tools to do that by using personal motivations, understanding the person, listening to them, just getting to know them and finding out what makes them tick, just what are they interested in? What do they want to do in life? Where do they want to go? How can that mesh with what I want?

Once you understand that, you can begin to leverage that. I don't mean that in a negative way. I mean that in a positive way. Once you understand a person and what they want, you can help them achieve that and, in this essence, achieve what you're trying to do as well. Especially if you plant the seed that this will get them where they want. Then the next thing, they're out there professing the faith and standing up and trying to get things done. It's their project, all of a sudden. It then frees you up, time to find someone else with a different motivation, a different skill set, to keep that momentum going, and you don't have to get wrapped up so much in the minutiae of the event. That's what I kind of mean by let folks, not let them think it's their idea, it is their idea, but help them get to that idea and help them foster that desire.

Khreiche: Thinking about crisis in food, crisis in the way we eat, in the way we produce our food, and also availability, food deserts, for example, in bigger urban regions are a thing, what role for you does education play? Where would you place responsibility for the way we eat? Is it with families? Is it with communities? Is it with governing bodies?

Cavey: Well, the answer to the last question first. It's all of them. Everybody has that responsibility. I think in my role as a farmer, I have that responsibility. I think that in farming, a lot of farmers—and it's just because

it's the tradition—they farm, they grow their crop and that's that, that's their specialty. I look at it differently. I say, "I think that we're so good at growing things, why can't we grow farmers?" If I can grow vegetables, which nowadays is pretty hard. You see how dry it has been the past couple days and weeks, and all the regulations that come up against us, the GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certifications and organic certifications, it's not an easy thing. If I can grow a vegetable, I can grow a farmer. And so, I have taken on the responsibility to do just that, to help.

We open our farm to interns. We actually had an intern last year from Virginia Tech on our farm. We work with the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition. Virginia Tech's own Kim Niewolny has helped us get high-school aged children on our farm, working. I find that from my perspective, it's partly the farmer's job to do that, to grow that farmer, and also to grow awareness of how fragile the food system is, and how we need to start building its resilience, from within. Then the consumer needs to take the initiative and say, "I demand a better product. I demand a product that tastes good, that is healthy," and not shop on the basis of price, entirely.

Price is important, I understand. I understand budgets. Trust me, I'm a farmer, I know a budget. But you can't use that as the only reason. If you pick up a newspaper today and open it up, there's always a grocery store insert in there. The boldest print in every one of those little coupons on there is the price, "99-cents a pound." You really have to look hard. I have to get my reading glasses out the see what is 99 cents a pound. That's just a skewed way of looking at food. I mean, we need to be looking at food that is responsibly grown, that is good tasting and that supports an economy that can continue to grow food.

Khreiche: In your talk earlier, you mentioned some strategies that you can put in place to combat this "99-cent big business" approach, when you go into the grocery store and you may not even know what you're buying for 99 cents. But the fact that you might be able to get anything for 99 cents might be enough for some people. What can you do as a farmers market to compete with such lower prices?

Cavey: For your first question, education. At our farmers market, we have a consumer education program. We actually budget funds to have workshops, so that we can bring consumers, I hate to call them "consumers." They're

our customers. They're what we rely on. We offer workshops for canning, for putting up food, for cooking lessons. My wife, who's a chef, does a monthly cooking lesson at the farmers market and it's a huge draw. People with notebooks and recorders and cameras are constantly snapping pictures of the recipes and all. They're learning how to how to prepare this food. Some of the challenge arises because of prepared foods and fast food chains. People have gotten away from how to cook food and or how to store food or put it up. We're trying to offer those things to our customers, so that we can give them the tools they need so that they buy more from us. In turn, we improve their health and their wellbeing, as well as our economic wellbeing.

Khreiche: To the extent that it's feasible, would, for example, including aspects of other cultures' cuisine into farming be a way of creating more inclusive environments of farming, growing and selling?

Cavey: Yes, absolutely. A little background: my wife and I used to have a Mexican restaurant. Being two white people running a Mexican restaurant, we appropriately named it Gringos Taqueria. It's a wonderful little restaurant and it is still operating in Virginia Beach. We sold it five years ago. If I could just take a commercial break here, it was just voted one of the Top Ten "Hole-in-the-Wall" restaurants in Virginia. We love cultural food. Doing our cooking demonstrations, we use that as a means to perhaps entice other people in our community who are not in touch with Southern cuisine, the fried chicken and okra, and all that. We say, "Hey, these products that you're traditionally used to can be grown here. Look, we're cooking this meal right here at the farmers market, so it's doable." I hope that that's a way to attract members of minority communities, especially in our area, where we have a strong Hispanic community. We love to see more of them coming to the farmers market and also more of them farming. We feel like they have a lot of expertise. They can bring a lot of skills to our farming community.

Wernecke: Do you all go off-site, out of the farmers market or off the farm to try to reach communities and educate K-12 youths? It seems that would allow people to learn about farming while remaining in their comfort zone?

Cavey: Michelle Pridgen, the town of Independence farmers market manager, right now is teaching a Home Ed class in the high school in Grayson County. That class last year began selling baked goods through our online farmers market. This year, we're trying to ratchet that up and get them to

serve some cold casseroles and some ready-to-eat food that they can serve at our farmers market.

So yes, we do. Outreach is a huge thing for us. As a farmers market, the manager and the staff and those of us that organize, often feel like the farmers and the vendors are our customers. We have to do everything we can to promote the farmers market, so they can be economically successful. One of the ways of doing that is marketing outreach, getting out into the community and talking about the market and getting more people involved with it. Where we are, outreach is a huge thing for us, for the farmers market and agriculture in general.

Omosa: I know that you've been in Grayson County for some time now. How has life in Grayson influenced your sense of community? Living there, how has it influenced you in terms of your sense of community?

Cavey: It's a small community. You hear stories about the "come-heres," and the "been- heres," and the separation between, well "you belong here," and all that. We worried about that. We were concerned that we would be looked at as outsiders, but I have not witnessed that at all. People have embraced us. We've had a wonderful relationship from day one, moving to the community. We met with our neighbors and we had bonfires and we farmed together and we cooked meals together. That grew, and I was just really touched by how welcoming the community was. In return, I just felt like it mobilized me. I saw a need. I saw gaps. I saw things that I could do for the community, where my skills were. It was painful to see this gap with which I knew that I could work. I jumped in and started working and people saw that. Both my wife and I feel like we're a big part of the community.

Omosa: You mentioned that you observed a gap that existed in the community. What are some of the things that you did, to actually make yourself available to the community?

Cavey: I think one of the first things is being an organic farmer. We tend to be a little snobbish and maybe think we're better farmers and that's not true. We're not better farmers. We farm in a different way and we farm with a different mindset. I didn't go into Grayson County and immediately start badmouthing or demonizing the way they were farming. As a matter of fact, I can tell you right now that as much as I learned from my organic farmer

mentor, John Wilson of New Earth Farms in Virginia Beach, I learned just as much from the Christmas tree farmer down the street, from the cattle rancher down the road and from the local tobacco farm. For three years, I allowed my neighbors to farm tobacco on my property before we moved up here. I learned so much from them about the mechanisms of agriculture.

I think, in a way, what helped with becoming a member of the community was joining with others and not trying to villainize what they were doing, but just being myself, doing what I wanted to do, and not speaking badly about the way they were doing things. It's amazing how many people, after a few years we were doing this, would come up to me and say, "How do you grow those potatoes again?" Or, "what do you do about cabbage moth? You don't spray Sevin Dust?" I say, "No, I don't really have cabbage moth problem." They're like, "That's amazing!" And they're adopting our methods. My wife teases and says to everybody we convert to organic, "Oh, you're coming over to the dark side." But in a sense, it's very rewarding to see this transition, as people see that this is successful: "These people are making money, growing organically. I'm not making money doing this traditional conventional farming. Maybe I should take a look at what they're doing and try to adopt some of those practices." That's probably been one of our biggest pleasures in community engagement.

Wernecke: What are some of the qualifications that make an organic farmer? What are the barriers for folks to enter that market? Maybe talk a little bit more about the competition between organic versus non-organic.

Cavey: Well, it's a national program now, to be certified an organic farmer. It's a little bit of paperwork and there are a lot of practices you have to adopt. You have to record those practices and keep good records. Now, to go out in a field and grow corn and spray chemicals all over it, there is no paperwork required. There are no federal regulations, other than having a license to use that chemical. It's kind of skewed in that direction, first off, that I have to do all this extra work to grow crops without using any pesticides or herbicides. It seems it's a bit skewed in that part. There's also an expense to it. Without any help, it's an annual cost of about \$1,500 for my farm to be certified organic. It isn't a huge amount of money, but it represents a portion of my costs.

There are a lot of programs out there, government programs and civic

and nonprofits, that are assisting with those costs. So, that's not a real good excuse right now. The cost of organic certification is beginning to go away and it's because people are demanding it. I would say, probably the biggest difference between an organic grower and a conventional one is a perception that our food is more expensive. In its most basic form, if I were to take a bag of my lettuce that I sell against a bag of lettuce in the grocery store, I could break that down in a matter of seconds. I sell a three-quarter pound bag of lettuce for \$6. If I go down to the grocery store, there's a \$4 bag of lettuce down there. But it's only five ounces. And it is in a big plastic box! If you do the math, we're getting pretty close to about the same price. But then it goes beyond that. What are the consequences, the health consequences of eating something that's not grown organically? I don't know. I'm not an expert in that, but it's something to consider. And they continue. That food's coming from a long way away. What's the cost to the environment, as it's trucked two thousand miles across the country, to get to that grocery store?

Khreiche: I'm very interested in the point of the paperwork that you bring up. In a way, it is a form of bureaucratic subsidy which favors big agricultural businesses, right? Can you identify some other areas in which subsidies are going against the current? I know you earlier mentioned cotton and how it is a problem, especially in terms of water. Can you tell me about that?

Cavey: Sure. The USDA classifies crops pretty much in two categories. This is farmer type of talk, so I may get these classifications incorrect, but, according to the Department of Agriculture, there are commodity and specialty crops. Commodity crops are typically your traditional soybean, corn and wheat. Cotton happens to be a commodity crop, too, maybe a few others. These are "fence-line to fence-line" crops being grown on a large scale. They are traded on the stock market. Their prices depend on whatever the investors say they're worth, not what the consumer wants. Specialty crops, on the other hand, are what we eat every day, including vegetables and fruits. Those crops garner very few subsidies.

As a matter of fact, the only real subsidies that specialty crops have right now are some grant programs out there like the USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food, the Farmers Market Promotion Program, and The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition. These are the types of programs that are beginning to come out of USDA because policy and public opinion are changing. Therefore, policy is now changing about, "Hey, we need to support

vegetables, as much as we do or at least to some degree that we do ethanol production.” I try not to go on my stump too much about that, but yes, I think that’s something, as far as policy goes.

It certainly can begin to shift in our favor. I would love to have some of the same tax benefits that commodity farmers do, who grow some of the subsidy crops. I would love to have access to some of the insurance they have. Maybe not myself because I’m kind of small in that regard, but a person that wanted to take it on, on a larger scale, take organic farming on to a larger scale, putting a couple hundred acres or a thousand acres in organics production, would need the same mechanisms that are in place for the wheat farmer. They’re not there today for that person to the degree that they exist for the wheat farmer.

Omosa: How do you see the future of organic farming in your community?

Cavey: First off, I’m a “boots-on-the-ground” kind of guy, looking at this thing from my perspective. I don’t have the studies or I don’t have the time really to understand it completely. I’m probably going to get a lot of feedback on this, but I’m not so sure that we can replace industrial agriculture, as it is right now. It’s so efficient. I don’t know that we’re ready to step up with organic farming and take over that role. That mantle cannot be passed. It will be a long transition and it takes people wanting to do it. There’s not a lot of people out there that want to take a thousand acres and grow it organically. I would say that it’s a tough road to go down, but I think it needs to be done. It needs to be at least considered, and aligning policy will be necessary to make it a considerable thing.

One, a person has to decide at some point in their life that farming is a career they want to get into. That’s a tough thing to think about right now, as a young person. On the way up here, I heard about students \$100,000 in debt, with no prospect of jobs. I know you guys don’t want to hear that, but there are those cases out there, too. Maybe there is an alternative to advanced education. Although farming definitely needs education, no doubt. I’d like to see the thought of a person growing up and becoming a farmer raised to the level of appreciation that a person growing up and becoming a doctor or a professional businessman is. That might help.

Khreiche: It seems like one of the stigmas associated with being a farmer

exists in the cultural mind. It's an ancient profession, but as you said, there's a lot of new things coming out. There are a lot of applications with education and with industry. It might be something to think about for the future. Clearly farming as a profession has changed a lot. As you said, big farming has become industrialized. Do you think that we're witnessing a new shift in that?

Cavey: Well, certainly farming has become more technologically advanced. It requires education, too, especially for those entering the industrial agriculture community. And there are careers, great careers in that. I think Virginia Tech puts a lot of graduates out, a lot of folks that are well prepared for that field. To the question of how the public perceives farming: Thomas Jefferson, and I paraphrase, I'm going to butcher this, said something to the effect that those that work in the ground should be held among society's most sacred, held in the highest regard, because they produce food and they work with nature and have within them a skill that few can garner.

That's something that I think we've lost sight of, maybe because we just pull up to a drive-in and the food gets passed out in a soggy bag to us. I don't know. I'm not sure where we lost that idea, that farming was an ancient, but not very respectable trade. I think, when people eat good food, they start to understand it. I think that's the big thing. I am on the other side of things where my wife's always trying to promote healthy eating and good food preparation. She's done more to change things than anybody I've ever seen. People eat a meal that she's prepared and they get pretty excited about food after that.

Wernecke: Agriculture is, I believe, one of the biggest industries in Virginia, but obviously the large producers are backed by very strong lobbyists. Has there been any interest from those major producers to collaborate with organic farmers? Or are they kind of spooked by this idea of organic farming?

Cavey: Absolutely! They're not spooked. They are engaged. Food City, one of our local grocery chains, has a very strong program for buying local. They've sent people to Grayson County and talked to groups as small as three farmers and said, "How can we help you get your food to our distribution center in Abingdon?" I think that they realized that—we talked about the global food market and how its food goes all around the world as a

system—they realized how fragile that system can be. A disruption can stop things pretty quickly.

Just take what happened to the little gas pipeline down south in Mississippi, I think it was. I couldn't get gas for a day in North Carolina when I was down there, because a pipeline burst. I think food's very much the same way. There's a lot of timing and logistics going into moving this food around. I think the grocery stores themselves are looking inward and saying, "If we had to fall back on our local environment, our local suppliers, could they produce?" They are fostering a movement in the local food industry. I am definitely not a "beat up the big guy" type. Every time I've gone to big business and said, "Hey, I got an idea," they welcome me and say, "Let's talk about what you need." I say, "I need a truck. I need a driver, or come get the stuff. Can you get a pallet?" They have to make money and it's sort of like, "Can you make it a pallet? We could do a pallet of food." I get all the farmers going and say, "Come on. Grow harder. Push. Push. Push." It's a back and forth, but I believe there is a very receptive group of folks working in local food businesses, in the food industry, that want to do this, want to see this happen.

Khreiche: You're a part of Grayson LandCare. You're a member of that nonprofit and it has played and served a role in advancing some of the work that you've been talking about. Talk with us a bit about how that organization has been developing as a community-based, grassroots organization; its transitions, and the process of its development?

Cavey: Sure. Grayson LandCare is a nonprofit and its mission, loosely, is that it promotes economic activities that preserve the cultural diversity and resources of the region and are sustainable. For instance, one of our annual events is the Save Green Expo. We bring in vendors asking what business they can offer. We ask, "What businesses are you doing that are sustainable?" We get a lot of vendors that have solar energy ideas and compost ideas and things of that nature. We have an expo fair and we bring in the public and the public can talk to these people and find out how they themselves could do businesses like these and or enjoy the benefits that these firms are offering.

We do an annual Land Stewardship contest, during which we give up to \$1,000 in scholarships to high school students. It's like a science fair, except it's based on economic ideas that are sustainable, are sustainable with the

resources in our area and can be developed in our region. That's been a great thing, to see the kids come in and do those exhibits. We have judges from all over and a list of people who come down to judge their ideas. It's just fascinating to be interviewed by folks like Anthony Flaccavento. It's neat to see these kids hold that \$1,000 check after they've won, beaming with pride. They look at things so differently.

Omosa: What are some of the ideas, the concepts, that they have suggested?

Cavey: A lot of times they're not new ideas, but they look at them in a way that brings a different perspective. One, we have a sawmill in our area, and we have a lot of manure in our area and so that creates a lot of sawdust and manure. One of the ideas one of the students had was that there were a lot of cattle that leave our area, that are shipped to feed lots and grow lots. The idea was to bring those cattle together to gather in a pasture near the sawmill. Utilizing this location, you've got this carbon material and this manure material. You mix them together to make fertilizer and compost, without any involvement of transportation. It was a great idea. To me, it was one of the most fascinating ones. It truly exists around us. There are these pastures and you really could do this. I thought it was just a neat way of looking at a composting facility that was on the site of a sawmill and included the cattle and its operation, almost like an enterprise in and of itself ... this cattle sawmill enterprise. Just neat ideas ... they take a lot more fleshing out to get them to work but it was a neat perspective.

Wernecke: Do those students usually then move on to either going to college to study farming or become farmers themselves? Or is it too soon to tell?

Cavey: Unfortunately, the bright ones, they go on to college and leave us. It's a real challenge to keep youth in our region. Many do not return. I don't begrudge them that. I left where I grew up and joined the military and had a great adventure. I think every child should have that opportunity. I don't begrudge them leaving. They need to go and find a life and live their adventure. I think it's great when one does stay and take on an operation that grows food in our area, as part of the agricultural community. But it's sad to see them go.

At one point, there was a group. They wanted to do an apple orchard and produce value-added products like cider and things like that. About the time

that they came up with that idea and won the scholarship, we had someone donate an apple orchard to us. We were looking for them, “Hey you guys want to run this thing? Look, some of this is in place.” Unfortunately, one kid had a scholarship to Oklahoma, another kid was going to Mississippi State. They were scattering and so it was unfortunate. But yes, it’s what you need to do. They need to go out and have some adventure first and then come back. They can be impactful that way.

Khreiche: Sometimes good ideas come out of necessity. Is it true that sometimes industries, when they’re well established, that they in some respects get lazy? That kid’s idea that you just mentioned, was it overlooked simply by the fact that they might not be necessary, or they might not have been perceived as necessary at the time?

Cavey: Yes. I think very much that people get locked into a zone, where they’re looking at profitability and looking at cutting costs and they forget about innovation. What these folks bring to us at the Save Green Expo is innovation. Every year, at the Save Green Expo, I do a Rocket Mass heater demonstration. I love my Rocket Mass heater. I lay claim to being the first with a sideways burn in Grayson County. If you’re a Rocket stove guy, that’s pretty cool. Now you guys get to go home and look up Rocket Mass heaters. I get to do that every year. With the heater itself, I can show people how efficient it is. They can boil a pot of water with a pine cone and things like that, but I really don’t know how to make them practical. I can’t figure out a practical use in a traditional home, in a modern home of today. You could build a cob home and use this in a cob home, but how can you heat a house with this super-efficient heater in a traditional home? Every year, that’s what I ask the people that sit around who go, “That is so cool. How do I build this now?” I say “Yeah, now can you give me a practical way to use this, because that’s what I really want, out of you guys. That’s why I’m here, I want to learn from you. You come up with the innovation.” That’s what those kids bring to us, some really great new ideas. They’re looking at things and they’re not prejudiced by profit and profitability and some of the structure that we have put in place in our businesses.

Omosa: What are some of the things you have in store for your community currently? What are the things you plan to do for the future?

Cavey: The big part of what I’m doing right now is the farmers market, where

we're getting ready to close our season. For the outdoor farmers market, we end the second week of October. It's on Independence Street, on Fridays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., across from the courthouse. What we do in the winter is plan our next season and our activities. This year we noticed, it's anecdotal evidence but we thought we saw a decline in vendors, a decline in customers. We are ready to give this thing a shot, a new jolt of energy. We may have gotten what you said earlier, a little bit complacent. It was so successful for the past couple of years and everybody was enjoying it, that it might have gotten a little stale for people. This year, one of the things we did was add a Kids' Activity Director. She has brought in a whole new crowd of folks. We're going to try to get that group more engaged.

We are looking at possibly adding a food truck to our farmers market and using it to buy product from the farmers and sell it as value-added food to people, so they can have lunch at the farmers market. We're looking at a prison in our town. We have a state penitentiary in our town, where we're trying to get involved with the penitentiary to do gardens. The rehabilitation rate for prisoners is dramatically different if there's a garden program, an agriculture program within the prison walls. We are really excited about maybe trying to get into that type of thing. The list goes on. It's going to be a busy winter for us. All of these things need to be resourced and funded and so we have the grant writers trying to find monies now. It's a busy winter ahead of us.

Chapter 10: Anthony Flaccavento

Anthony Flaccavento, Author, sustainable and rural development activist, economic development consultant, politician

Date of Interview: October 24, 2016

Interviewers: Andy Morikawa, Anna Erwin, Pallavi Raonka

Andy Morikawa: Anthony, let me begin by asking you, you've been doing quite a bit of traveling both domestically here in the U.S., as well as in Australia and Canada. We find ourselves immersed in a contentious political process as a part of the presidential campaign. I'm wondering, what your sense is, of that conversation as it is occurring from the bottom-up, in the grassroots community, around these very divisive issues.

Anthony Flaccavento: That's a really challenging question to answer for sure, because it's not the same everywhere. Also, I'm still figuring out what I think the response is, at the grassroots. Some things are common over the last three months, either for my normal consulting work or as a result of presentations related to the book. I've been all over Australia. I've been in rural Northeastern Kansas. I've been at Oberlin College in Ohio and I've been in different parts of New Mexico. A couple of things I'll say is that in all of those places, I was spending most of my time with a real mix of people who are focused on improving their own local economy. Some of them had a food system focus. Some had a broader economic development focus.

The one thing in common, i.e., maybe a piece of hope, in a not terribly hopeful political environment, or even a time, is that in spite of the sometimes savageness of this political campaign, the oversimplification, the racism that we have seen and heard so much, the misogyny, on and on and on and on, in spite of the kind of depressing political dialogue, there are still thousands and thousands of people who are spending their days trying to improve their local communities. There is a lot of rage in our country that's been perhaps stoked and galvanized in this campaign, I think there's no denying that. But by the same token, I would say to people: Don't lose hope because even as that's going on, there's a whole lot of other people from

all walks of life, from all political persuasions, who are really working hard to build stronger, more diverse local economies, that actually work well for ordinary people. That's, maybe, the take away.

Some of those folks are pretty engaged politically. Most of them are not. Most of them, at this point, have given up on the political process. They may vote, but otherwise, they just don't see a point to getting involved. But they haven't gone home. They're not just sitting at the house watching the N.F.L. on Thursday night and Sunday afternoon. They're actually out there, creating opportunities for local businesses, connecting farmers and consumers, working on changing local policy to improve bottom-up economics. There's a lot of folks doing good work, in spite of that.

Anna Erwin: I actually live in Appalachia now and have for about 13 years. I'm curious to know how you came to live and work in Appalachia, and specifically how your experiences in Appalachia have influenced your recent book project.

Flaccavento: I came to the region, initially, in the late 1970s. I was working in southeastern Kentucky, more or less across the mountains from where I now am, in far Southwest Virginia. For a while I was working with the "Soil," with what was then called the Soil Conservation Service. Then I worked for an engineering firm for a couple years, doing strip mine reclamation. That was my first experience of Appalachia. Then after graduate school, I ended up back, across the mountains in Southwest Virginia. I have been there ever since. It has been 31 years continuously, since then.

You know here's the interesting thing. Much of the Appalachian region of most states is far away from the center for power. When you look at Southwest Virginia, Abingdon is almost 325 miles from the state capital. And you can go further west than that. You look at parts of East Tennessee, they're a long way from Nashville. Southeastern Kentucky is a long way from Frankfurt. Part of what happens in those kinds of areas is that people realize that they're substantially on their own to make things happen. That is sometimes a negative. Sometimes, it just leads to frustration or despair, but more often, what I found is it has led to a lot of creativity. You know the old saying, "Necessity is the mother of invention." I have found in Southwest Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, Southern West Virginia, that there's an awful lot of people doing some very, what we might call, cutting-edge work in local

economy and triple-bottom-line businesses, that are good for people and the environment and that built social equity, certainly, in food systems and in farming. Somehow, being marginalized and also being in a kind of chronically difficult economic situation for several generations now, has led to a lot of problems for a lot of people. I am not trying to paint a rosy picture, but it has also fostered this spirit, kind of a rebellious innovative spirit, that as an outsider to the region, I've been able to learn a lot from and also sometimes tap into, to galvanize some new ways of thinking about the economy.

Pallavi Raonka: As you are the founder of Appalachian Sustainable Development, you have had experience with both defining and working on the ground to address that goal. When you say, “sustainable development,” what do you mean, and specifically for what, whom and why?

Flaccavento: When we started A.S.D., Appalachian Sustainable Development, in 1994—we officially opened the doors in 1995—it was only a couple of years after the 1992 Rio gathering, that sort of officially coined the term “sustainable development” and started to put some definition behind it. I was kind of vaguely aware of it, but I didn't know much about it. Really, sustainable development for us came out of it. At that point, I had been in the Appalachian region for almost 20 years, but continuously for a little more than a decade. What I kept seeing was that there always seemed to be this very bad choice that people were being asked to make. Did they want the factory, or did they want to preserve the floor space? Did they want this set of jobs that were being promised or perhaps were materializing or did they want the union and labor protections? Were they going to worry about “some little health problems” or were they going to be business friendly? It always came down to this sort of lose-lose proposition for workers, for the local community, and often for the ecosystem, of which people and businesses were a very big part.

Our definition of “sustainable development” fundamentally came out of that experience. We felt that communities were being given non-choices or only bad choices. At the end of the day, when they were asked to choose between jobs or the environment, they usually actually ended up getting neither. Jobs would be short term, or they'd pay poorly, or the company would come for a little period of time and when they got a better deal somewhere else, they moved on. And the ecological damage they created, whether it was to the forests or to the groundwater, to the Clinch River, or whatever it was,

lingered for a long time. Fundamentally, when we started thinking about “sustainable development,” what we had was a really good, clear example of what it was not. Our definition emerged mostly out of that experience, to say, surely there’s got to be a way to create an economy that works well for people, that is rooted in the place, not that could anonymously be located in any part of the world and that sustained the ecosystem. That’s the way we saw it. That came to be pretty similar to the common definition of sustainable development that is, you know, good for people today, without compromising future generations, and development that pays attention to social equity, to the environment and to a healthy economy. But we didn’t start with those lofty principles. We started with how bad things were, and said, we’ve got to figure out a way basically to forge development that works better for people and better for the environment. That was our simple straightforward definition.

Erwin: I’m also curious about another aspect of your professional career, when you ran for office. I am specifically curious about why you ran for Congress. What have you learned from that experience and how is your political career influencing your work now and into the future?

Flaccavento: I ran for office because number one, I thought about what I had learned from my own experience in Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee. Also, by then, this was in 2012, by that time I had had the opportunity to start working around the U.S. and a little bit in Canada, with similar goals of building a healthy economy that was good for people and good for the environment. I had this little inkling of a sense that a whole lot of good was happening in all kinds of places, from rural areas to mid-sized towns to big cities across the country, and that most people simply didn’t know about it. Certainly, they might have known something about it in their own community, but they had no sense that this was part of a larger “up-welling,” an emergence of a viable alternative. One of my motivations was to lift up that body of sustainable development, or bottom-up economy, as I call it now. A second motivation was connected to that. Although a lot of good stuff was happening, I found that it wasn’t adding up to changing the public debate and certainly not creating public policies that mostly sustained these healthy-living local economies and their communities. The policy agenda was kind of clueless about most of this work in these emerging alternatives, and so we needed to change that.

Fundamentally, I entered the race to lift up that experience and to start saying, we can actually support these kinds of living economies, with better public policy at the local, state and federal level. I used to start my stump speeches by saying, trickle down doesn't work. It never has. It never will. It's just sucking up wealth. It's not trickling down. It's sucking it up from local people, communities and transferring it to a small group at the top, who have no attachment to our community. Then I went on to describe what this bottom-up alternative was. What I found was that that message resonated in sort of liberal pockets in Blacksburg and it resonated in the heart of the coal fields and it resonated in some rural communities that were primarily agricultural. I was delighted to learn that a much broader base of people than the so-called liberal or progressive part of the spectrum, which is pretty small in our part of the world, actually thought that made a whole lot of sense and rang true to their own experience. That was probably the most encouraging thing from the campaign.

Erwin: That's very much reflected in the presidential campaign, I would say as well, that similar sort of messaging, working with the people.

Flaccavento: I think so. I think so. I mean, I think Bernie Sanders probably did the best job at speaking to those concerns and speaking to them in a way that was not fundamentally divisive or isolating certain groups of people as the ones that are out to get you. I was just reviewing a remarkable article by a woman from Kansas, who grew up in a small rural town on a farm and working-class family, named Sarah Smarsh. The title of the article tells you what it's about. It is how the liberal media elites failed the working class in the U.S. It's actually a brilliant, brilliant article that I highly recommend. But you know, again, that resonated with my own experience that people have a certain notion that working folks are poorly educated, and because they're poorly educated, they're susceptible to certain kinds of messaging. While there may be some truth to that, what I found was actually almost the opposite. There are a lot of smart coal miners and farmers and loggers and factory workers and others, who have been largely abandoned by our political process. Those folks rightly are wanting to be heard now.

Erwin: This question is, I think, related. In my work, I think a lot about local systems and specifically how culture works in local systems. From what I've read and understand of your work thus far, it does focus a lot on policy and economics and culture. What I'm curious about is, for example in Europe,

many local systems have the propensity or the capacity also to demonstrate xenophobic tendencies or more patriarchal sorts of concentration of wealth, especially when the movement or the policy for localization is connected to land, specifically. I'm curious, how do your ideas address that sort of local tendency, that is, localities can be "open local" or "closed local"? I'm curious about your experience with that, if you have any, and how you are thinking about that possible issue, with local systems and policy choices.

Flaccavento: That's a really interesting question. Let me try to tackle it in a couple of ways. For one, some of the work that I've been doing for quite a while, and actually the first of the six transitions that I describe in my recent book [*Building a Healthy Economy from the Bottom Up*, 2016], is about building resilient communities and restoring the base of skills and also the relationships and what is needed, so that local people from the household level through to the neighborhood in the local community are less dependent and they're more self-reliant and then, by extension, more resilient, right? And that's a movement that is easily and broadly embraced by people on both the left and the right. In fact, if anything, more people on the right, but certainly strong for both. We've seen that. We've seen that, in the kinds of people who both are setting up local businesses and doing farming and the people who are shopping at those farms and buying from those local businesses. We've seen it in the kind of political clout that emerges at debates around food safety laws and the ability of local people to make their own decisions, right? There is this, and again it's a uniting thing, but also woven throughout that is that some people who are pushing for community self-reliance or local resilience are doing it because they fear catastrophe. They fear the imminent breakdown of society and they want to be sure that they can protect themselves and take care of their own. Other people are coming without the same goal, but adopting the same strategies because they want to lift up their communities. They want to be part of a vibrant community of people, i.e., a diverse group of people that help care for one another.

It's really different motivations and I honestly don't know how that will play out. Here's a couple of examples where I think it can be harnessed for good, even if the motivation includes sort of, more of a self-driven kind of protectionism if you want to call it that. When we started our food hub, which we called Appalachian Harvest back in the day, which I haven't run

for quite a few years now, but I helped to launch it back in 1999-2000, the fundamental idea was to bring together small and mid-size farmers to share resources. They decide who's going to grow what, in order to meet market demand in both quantity and quality, that they can't meet on their own. That's the kind of basic idea. It's an aggregation thing. Many people said, "You'll never get these farmers to work together, never. They are too independent. They're competitive with each other." Particularly, they thought we would never get the sort of salt-of-the-earth tobacco farmer to work with some of these emerging, sort of, back-to-the-land or hippie farmers. What we found was that, because they needed each other to meet the demands of these markets—and we were able to tap supermarkets, grocery stores, colleges and universities—that they did in fact start working together, out of necessity.

Once they'd been working together out of necessity for a period of time, they began to build relationships. Although who knows what the full range of the political spectrum they represent is, the fact is that that group still continues today as a sort of informal but very cohesive network of supposedly completely individualistic farmers, who work together on a whole range of things, from sharing equipment to ordering seeds and materials, to producing for market. I think it's one of a number of examples that are starting to emerge, that when you create the potential for people to work together and the need for them to work together, they're not just meeting to share with one another. They're meeting because they need each other. You can then gradually start to overcome some of the division and create a culture of mutual benefit, if not cooperation.

Erwin: I have one more question. There is something else that we sort of brainstormed about. There are various reasons why advocacy and sustainable development groups are unable to sustain themselves over a period of time. Some of them change direction, just a little bit. Sometimes, when there is a sustained transition between leadership, the tone of the organization, or the movement or even a larger scale political party will change, right? One important key to such changes of tone, or perhaps even their inability to sustain themselves is leadership, right? Can you talk more about these issues specifically? Also, I was curious about your style of leadership, and if you chose that model or it chose you?

Flaccavento: I mean, my style of leadership, Lord, I don't know. It's kind

of “lead some sense into those fools.” It’s kind of learning by doing. It’s an action-oriented one. When we started ASD, which was by no means the first group that I started, that concept of sustainable development, as Pallavi asked, was sort of out there. I knew that personally, I wanted a role in it. I also felt, for our community, that the last thing that people needed was another group that was going to create a complex intellectual framework, with you know, 42 different parameters of sustainability that you put into a matrix and measure how well or poorly you did. I knew that what I needed to do and what people needed to see was something different on the ground. If there’s anything that kind of characterizes my particular leadership style, it’s always been trying to do stuff, and then learn from it, and then do more stuff, maybe a little more smartly. It is because you learn something in the process, and, of course, conduct research and connect to others. It really is very much action-learning-oriented, I would say. The larger leadership question for nonprofits and for organizations in the movement as a whole, is almost unanswerable. It is definitely not unusual for a group that’s, let’s say, been a pathbreaking kind of group, to introduce some new ideas and maybe change some ways of thinking. When the founder/leader leaves, I know of a number of groups that either went under or just fundamentally changed their role.

I feel proud to say that the person running ASD now has brought her own vision to it and others, too, but it has also continued a significant part of what we started. It is different, but there hasn’t been that sort of change or diminution. A lot of times, that does happen. I think a lot of that’s a funding question. A lot of that is that it’s just really hard to make these things work in the nonprofit world. Everybody wants to create a revenue stream now that replaces grant and public funding, which is just a really, really challenging thing for most of them to do. It is kind of constantly accumulating the wealth of experience and then building more and more. It is tough to do because a change in leadership can signal a change in support from funders. That can really make things tough.

Raonka: As you were talking about the local economy, I can draw a lot of connections to the Gandhian idea of “Swaraj.” Basically, these are autonomous village economies that are sustainable in nature, so that’s interesting. I’ve done ethnographic research and advocacy work in rural India, specifically around issues of food security. What I’ve noticed is that

advocacy groups are often present to bridge the gap and facilitate the meeting of community needs, but in many instances, there is a gap or difference of opinion between community and advocacy group members. How do you bridge that gap? Do you have a story from your experience, working with communities, where you have found that gap? Were you able to bridge that gap or not?

Flaccavento: Specifically, around food security or just more broadly in sustainable economic development?

Raonka: More broadly in terms of working with community issues.

Flaccavento: This is one of my pet peeves of late. I've always got a few of them, as Andy [Morikawa] knows, that I'm trying to annoy somebody about. One of them is that I think that the advocacy group, as you referred to it, that I would sort of more broadly say, kind of progressive thinkers, so-called progressive thinkers, economic progressives. There's like a thinking class of people who, for whatever set of reasons, they generally, not out of maliciousness, but generally, don't see people in the field, either the farmers and the working people themselves or even the practitioners who work with the farmers and working people, as part of the thinking class. They see us as the implementers, the doers, the place where their ideas are sort of tested and refined. Then they take them back and think some more and develop them. That's a bit simplistic, but not much. One of the issues we face, generally, is that, the people who are at the think tanks, are at the universities, who promulgate ideas, theories that then become part of the public debate and part of public policy, are generally a few steps removed from community. Again, it's not universal, but it's pretty common. One of my strategies, of late, myself personally, but also a strategy adopted by many others who are both working people, but also advocates for their communities, is to knock on the door and say: "Hey, you guys there, you're not the only ones who can think about this, you know. We don't just implement. We actually have an occasional thought. If you'd let us be part of the process, maybe your thinking would be a little richer and a little more grounded. Maybe you'd also be able to build more of a base of support for some of your good ideas."

That's one of the strategies. At the ground level, what we've generally tried to do is—I wouldn't say that my approach or some other successful ones I

know are completely and solely generated by local people—it's more like I, as kind of an outside instigator who came to Appalachia 30-some years ago, might throw out an idea among a group of farmers or a group of food justice advocates or a group of loggers and sort of see what kind of reception it gets. Then, maybe, if there's enough interest, not like universal endorsement, but a few people willing to try it, if there was a tobacco farmer, too, saying, "You know tobacco is not doing me much good anymore, let me see about that organic produce. I never thought about that before," then we would run with that idea and sort of build it out and see whether it was feasible.

You sort of get the best of both worlds, that way. In a sense, you get maybe some new thinking and some new insights, by coming from another perspective. But it's very quickly embedded in the community that you're working in, and tested and developed there, on a sort of relatively level playing field, rather than the way, normally there's a whole carefully developed prescription that people try to implement. This is a different way of doing it.

Raonka: I think theory and practice should go hand in hand, always. My experience working with rural communities, time and time again, made me realize that the policy implementation is more sustainable, or getting policy in place, if there is a strong social movement to support it. How does my experience resonate with your own? If it is different, what have you learned about the relationship between social movements and policy implementation?

Flaccavento: I think it's really different in the States, and this is way outside of my experience level. It's just from what I've read. I think in many so-called developing countries, particularly but maybe a little bit more in Europe, particularly in so much of the developing world, there is just, for all the enormous problems, more social cohesion. There's more of a sense of being part of a public body, right? That might be fraught with all kinds of problems and issues, but it's still part of, I mean, we are just so much more fundamentally individualistic in the States. I think we obviously have a lot of resources and other things going for us, but we have this big problem. Generally, a lot of people want individually customized kinds of solutions. That's where, again, that example comes in of those tobacco farmers and others coming together, because they need each other.

We never would have persuaded them on the power of our words to do that. It was because it was a market opportunity. I've seen that emerge in a number of ways, but I think it's fundamentally harder in the U.S. What I see in the U.S., rather than social movements, as we understand them in the developing world being the sort of the larger body out of which local economies emerge, is more like trying to figure out how to connect the social movements, like there's a social movement for a just and fair economy that's emerging in the U.S. It includes ideas around more cooperative principles, more sharing principles, more ecological conservation, etc. It's got elements of a social movement. It's a lot of young people. It's a lot of students. It's a lot of people who want to see a better world. But they're not the people doing the work in the trenches, either as the farmers or entrepreneurs or as the people working with them. I think the strategy in the United States is to figure out how to take that actual work of the practitioners and align it with and meld it with the larger social movements. Together, maybe they could become a potent political force. That's my hope and it's also my belief that that's possible.

Raonka: I always wonder how things happen in the U.S., because, as you mentioned, the economy and generally the society is very individualistic. It's very different from how I have seen it in communities in India. A lot of your work focuses on rural communities and livelihood in the U.S. However, there is little to no mention of rural communities in the national election debates and media. From your experience, what is the overall impact of this negligence? How do you think these concerns should be addressed?

Flaccavento: I think that they're not exactly the same issue, but I think the utter neglect of rural communities, rural livelihoods, and rural issues is at least closely tied, if not part and parcel, of the utter neglect of working people's issues more broadly, including urban working people, right? They're not the same concerns, but they're pretty close. They've both been the object of sustained neglect and derision for a long time, right? Again, looking at the progressive side, which is more my side, the politically and economically progressive side, I'm frankly sick and tired of it. I'm writing a lot about it. I'm knocking on the door, trying to change that. I'll give you an example. There was an interesting document that came out. I think it was in 2015, I believe. It was, I think, put out by the Working Families' Coalition. It was about a 55-page document about what was essentially an analysis of our

problems and a set of prescriptions of strategies of how we could really build a better, more just, healthier economy. It was really quite good. It had a lot of specifics in it. It had a good analysis. But in the 55 pages, the words “farm,” “farmer” or “agriculture” were never, literally, never, mentioned once. The word “rural” came up either once or twice, but only in the context of mentioning that U.S.D.A. [United States Department of Agriculture] had some rural programs. It was essentially a prescription. The interesting thing was that the people who released it, at the very outset said “our purpose is to galvanize a broadly-based coalition to address these questions, including people who’ve been marginalized,” but somehow, all of rural America was not understood to be potentially part of that broadly based coalition. This kind of “leaving out” is absolutely the norm. I think it’s partly because, again, the thinking class, even if they grew up in the country, although not many of them did, is most comfortable considering urban centers. I think a lot of folks that are in that frame of mind are either perplexed or they are even somewhat repulsed by some of what they perceive to be coming from rural communities.

Again, overcoming that is partly penetrating that world and saying, “It ain’t all like you think.” I wrote a blog post for Huffington Post a couple years ago that was titled, “It Ain’t All Duck Dynasty Out Here.” Some of it is, and a lot of people are saying that in one way or another. The other thing is, again, highlighting these amazing innovations that are coming from farmers and working people and are coming from rural communities that are science-based. They’re smart. They use resources wisely. They have multiple positive economic impacts. In other words, there’s a lot of smart people, doing smart things, with minimal resources in some of these very same communities that most of the progressive movement in the political establishment has written off.

Raonka: We’re having this interview at Virginia Tech and it’s a large land grant university. What is your opinion and thoughts about higher education and community? Particularly, do you think universities and academic research can be a tool for advocacy? Why or why not and how?

Flaccavento: Let me say that when I started doing organic and sustainable agriculture stuff, and also the sustainable forestry work that we were doing at ASD, this was basically in the early 1990s when we were kind of beginning to experiment with some ideas in Southwest Virginia and in East Tennessee,

the Land Grants were not our friends. I'll be very honest, not Virginia Tech, not the University of Tennessee.

The only exceptions to that were actually, and very interestingly both in Kentucky and in Virginia, the 1890 land grants. These universities came about in response to the lack of access to higher education for African Americans. Those are always underfunded, but they were more responsive to and interested in the sort of innovation that helps small farmers and what not. But let me just say, broadly, that we have come a long way in the last 20 years.

We went from having some of these ideas about sustainability, sustainable ecologically-based forestry, ecological farming and many of those other things which were either flat out opposed or more often just dismissed by the Land Grants, and maybe not the “center of their universe” to this point where they're treated seriously. They have very smart faculty and students who are really working on these issues, whether it's from an etymological soils perspective or whether it's from a social change perspective. I think the Land Grants and the academic community more broadly are certainly in a much better place vis-a-vis the groundwork in the community now, than when I started into this. That's the good news. I also think there are lots of faculty members, and I know just a few of them, and some different universities, who are anxious to work directly with the people in the field, whether in the fields of agriculture, forestry or economic development. I think that many of them have no sense that they have a greater base of knowledge. There's a lot of these faculty members that I have experience with that are entering into it as peers. I have certainly felt treated like peers. Those together, I think, are quite promising.

I do think that there still is a bubble around academia. That bubble insulates people and that bubble not only insulates them and sort of keeps them a few steps removed from the folks that they hope to serve or assist, but also, it's the language they use. Let's be honest, the academic community and the progressive community, Lord in heaven, we can't say anything straightforwardly. I mean, really, it's just remarkable how long it takes to say anything. Everything is nuanced and contextualized. There's never a definitive statement made because we don't believe that anything is absolute. It's precisely the opposite of what has happened really on the political right, which is saying things perhaps over simplistically, but

nevertheless in a kind of straight-shooting way, that a whole lot of people can understand. Right or wrong, true or false, that kind of language resonates. I think that the gap is still with the academic community doing more connecting with the work on the ground, you know in an equal way, but also then being open to other people's language, other people framing of the questions.

Raonka: I think as an academic, we kind of have constantly to be reminded of this thing. We are just separated from what is happening in practice or on the ground and there has to be constantly, as I said, a connection between theory and practice.

Erwin: What role do you think—and maybe you've already touched on this a little bit—education could play in some of the proposals you've made in your new book? Just speak to your experience and also ideas that you have for the future. What are some of your visions and how do they relate to education specifically? I mean all of education, not just higher education.

Flaccavento: Again, lots of ways to respond to that. One, again, we have kind of a hierarchy in how we think of education, who is educated and who is not. We've been lucky to have, a couple times in the last 15 years, hosted in our family foreign exchange students for the academic year. They were high school kids and, in both cases, for whatever reason, they ended up being from Germany. What's interesting among other things is how, in Germany in particular, but also in several other countries, what we call vocational education, or basically education that teaches people to do something with their hands, whether it's to be a robotics person or a welder or whatever, is not a secondary career track, the way it is here. In our system, starting in high school and going on through community college, there's sort of a notion that really smart kids go in this track and that is toward so-called higher education, which is more education of the mind, and that the underperformers, they go into vocational or technical education, etc. right? And so, then the career rewards, perhaps at least until recently, also tracked with that. I think that part of the problem with that, is that it assumes that you can be a farmer or a logger or a small business owner doing technical work and be relatively mindless about it, right? That's really unfortunate.

I remember a wonderful Wendell Berry essay from many, many years ago, in which he talked about he and his daughter unloading cow manure from

a truck onto a farm field while they were discussing Yeats. One of the great things I see is an awful lot of the people I work with, particularly farmers, but also some other working folks, are just really very smart, thoughtful people. Getting to your question, we need to stop bifurcating or dividing the educational world into lower and higher, and recognize that there's all kinds of potential.

Secondly, we need to recognize that we are generally doing a poor job of educating people for citizenship, whatever their career track. There's tremendous pressure on universities, particularly with the issue of student debt when they leave college. Universities have more and more pressure to make people highly employable, and so therefore, some of the grounding in all the elements of citizenship, whether it's sociology or political science or whatever, is getting short shrift. I think that's an urgent need that we have there. I do think, again, if we can recognize the tremendous thoughtfulness of this emerging bottom-up economy in many places, that there are great intellectual resources at universities that could be partnered with those groups.

Again, one of the big policy issues is, as states have pulled back their funding for universities, the university research agenda has become more driven by what corporations are willing to fund and that generally is not triple-bottom-line businesses, such as community solar gardens or vertical ocean farming. All those different things that I discuss in the book are not on the corporate agenda. As a result, there's a harder argument to get universities to use their intellectual capacity to do the research that a lot of us in the field would be delighted to have them doing.

Raonka: My question is more in terms of global versus local, and it's more to do with my own research also, because I worked extensively in India and then I came here and I'm writing about the struggles of people that I witnessed. We often see local movements or local community trying to be more inclusive in nature, without being defensive about it. The question is, what is that point where local communities align themselves with other groups or movements? How do they make that decision?

Flaccavento: In Appalachia, the United Mine Workers of America (the UMWA) has been whittled down to very, very little. There are very, very few union mines left. Over its history, it elevated the fortunes of miners in terms

of better wages and safer working conditions. I worked quite a bit with UMWA during the Pittston and Coal strike and for a number of years, back in the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s. It also deliberately and kind of systematically adopted a position of solidarity with miners in Colombia and in China. Whether it was about, for a period of time, all the explosions at Chinese mines killing thousands of miners or whether it was the working conditions of miners in Colombia or what not, the UMWA represented one of those things that was fundamentally local and primarily focused on better wages and working conditions for local people in their community, but by its nature, readily aligned with people very different in most other ways culturally, racially and what not. That was a wonderful thing, because you would see that miners who did not even a high school education had a sense of empathy in connection to people in very different parts of the world. That was no small thing, in a little rural community, with the sort of whittling down, not just of the UMWA, but of most unions in this country. This is to say that one of the big institutions that helped make local-global connections is, if not gone, quite weak now. How do we replace that? How do we build that same sense of connection? I don't know.

I would say this, that again, as you start to build these stronger, more diverse local economies, that a lot of different kinds of people seem to think are maybe better, maybe people who thought their only options were Wal-Mart and if they had a little money, they had to put it into something that went to Wall Street, now they're beginning to participate in the new kind of economy. They're thinking, maybe this is better for me and for my community. As we do that, that's mostly still very parochial in nature, most of that work. But it opens the door to, for instance talk about trade policy. I found this with liberals and conservatives, both of whom mostly don't understand trade policy.

More fundamentally, they just think it's a hopeless kind of thing. When you start making linkages about how both current and pending trade pacts directly disadvantage the businesses and the types of local and state decision-making that has started to create this better economy that they're thinking might be a better bet, when you start to make those connections to this international trade policy and say, "not only will this not be good for your local community but here's some examples of what it's done to similar local communities in very different parts of the world," you may have the inkling of

a strategy that links the local with the global. But it's a real struggle because there's an awful lot of good people who are just like, we should take care of our own and stop giving all our money to those other countries, which of course is a great fallacy. Anyway, there is a lot to overcome, but I think that there may be a kernel of some positive approach there.

Raonka: Thank you for your response on this. The area that I spent my maximum time around, for three years there before joining Virginia Tech, was to study a strong movement against Arcelor Metal Mining. Ultimately, the citizens I followed did not let Arcelor Metal enter their area. I have a friend who is doing research in Appalachia and I know Arcelor Metal is mining in that area. If these movements can draw, kind of, learn from each other, it would be great. I think the biggest struggle I felt, both working in the field, and over a year when I taught as an instructor, is that such imagination doesn't exist. You have to bring those examples and I think that's where it's very important to draw these parallels and learn from each other.

Flaccavento: Yeah, yeah. Two things, real quickly. Mimi Pickering, who is a good friend of mine, who is on the staff at Appalshop, which is a remarkable community media and documentation group that has been around for the better part of 50 years now, I won't get the quote exactly right, but it's in the book. Mimi once said, very simply, "people need to have something that they can be for, people need to see something better or you're going to get just more division, more apathy, more despair, and fewer people can actually see real things emerging, that seem like they might be better." That's one piece we need. That's imagination. Sometimes, that imagination, that spark comes from outside. Sometimes, it comes from within.

The other is getting over again, in this country, this very, very strong divide that's partly our individualism. It's also the mythology of the last forty years especially, which is that the "free market represents freedom and that government represents a reduction in freedom," which sometimes it does for sure. During my campaign in 2012, I was at a little house gathering in, not in my home county, but a neighboring county. At the end of my little speech and some questions, people were milling about and one of the people was a woman who identified herself as a local business person. She ran a little retail store, very much like a "bottom-up" economy kind of person. I came over and introduced myself to her. She said, "If you win, I want one thing from you, if you get to Congress, just one thing." I said what's that. She said,

“Leave me alone, just leave me alone, a small business. We want you to just leave us alone.”

You know, I get that. I'm a farmer. I know sometimes the government can be intrusive, etc. Well about three minutes later, as I was milling about, she was also part of another conversation with two or three other people who were in her community and they were lamenting the fact that an abandoned gas station, the guy who owned the gas station, had left his tanks in the ground and they had started to leak and fuel was leaking out into the creek and into the groundwater, which was poisoning wells. That very same local business woman was saying, in the midst of that conversation said, “Somebody has got to do something to stop that guy from doing it. That's not right.” I said to her. “Don't you think he just wants the government to leave him alone?” Again, in our country, there's this really big struggle where we've so mythologized the free market and also defined government as completely antagonistic to the public. We must overcome that and see that there's actually very, very close interplay between the two; that we can't have too much government regulation, of course, but also that the free market alone, doesn't work without some sort of common understanding that we all agree to, about what the rules are.

Chapter II: Tracy Kunkler

Tracy Kunkler, Social Profit Strategies, Circle Forward

Date of Interview: April 27, 2015

Interviewers: Andy Morikawa, Rebecca Ligrani, Garland Mason, Anna Erwin

Andy Morikawa: Tracy, why don't you share with us some of your experience working with the Appalachian Foodshed Project, which is a project involving three state universities in West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina? You have been working with them on issues of governance among multi-stakeholder groups.

Tracy Kunkler: I started with the Appalachian Foodshed Project about two and a half years ago. The group included three universities that had joined together to have an impact in what they were calling the foodshed, which is similar to the concept of the watershed. It's a pretty big endeavor to cross organizational lines and start to find and create a culture that really transcends individual institutions. Part of the project, also, was to reach out to community partners on the ground, people who are doing work in their communities, forging that relationship between academics and people who are working day-to-day, improving food systems, especially creating stronger local food networks. It's a lot of different points of view, a lot of different interests, and a lot of different ideas about the best way to move forward coming together around the table. Anytime you have that kind of an intentional network forming, folks need to think about how they're going to work together. They start to think about governance. How do they want to relate to each other and how do they want to make decisions? From the beginning, the Appalachian Foodshed Project really wanted to have an inclusive decision-making process. That was a really good fit with the process that I teach folks, which is Circle Forward, an inclusive consent-based governance practice.

Morikawa: When you use the term consent, is that the same as consensus?

Kunkler: Well, it's not. I listened to a talk recently by somebody addressing governance, and I wish I could remember his name right now, but he frames

it as that middle place between decision-making, like top-down or autocratic and consensus and a new place that's forming that really empowers people who have initiative to be able to go forth with their efforts, but do so in a different way that takes into account other people's perspectives. He called this new kind of decision-making advice giving. He said in these companies, the rules of the game are that if you have an idea, you are welcome to explore it, but you have to go around to anybody that's going to be affected by the idea and get their advice concerning it. That's a lot closer to what consent is. A recent definition that I heard is that nobody can articulate any risks that we're not willing to take. A big difference between consent and consensus that I see in my work is that when people have value, they want all voices to be included. They believe that whoever is affected by a choice should be part of that decision. When they hold that value system, there can be a tendency to imagine that you weigh in on every decision with that process. What happens, actually is we end up disempowering leaders. I see that perspective not as part and parcel with consensus, because I've seen consensus practiced in ways that I would call consent.

Many people practice consensus, but when consensus gets dysfunctional is when everybody in the group feels like they want to weigh in on any action that's taken and any decision that's made. That can be very frustrating for a leader who's trying to move something forward. It's like being micro-managed by the group. That's another difference that I've seen, and that's something I'm really working with groups on now, to say one has to be really clear when they're empowering somebody in a role, and then step out of their way, to be clear about all the decisions that they can take independently. The other piece is to ask that question of, what's the real risk? If you can't articulate real damage to the initiative or to somebody's ability to perform their role, then let it happen. Most of what we are doing right now with the Foodshed group are experiments.

Morikawa: How do you handle when somebody just has a feeling that they can't fully express about an idea that's being proposed and they can't immediately articulate why they oppose it, but they just have this feeling about it?

Kunkler: That's what tells me that they're non-consenting, I don't feel settled about this. I think it's really hard for some folks in the group and in front of everybody really to articulate that. Practice would allow that person an

opportunity to be able to articulate what they are feeling, and to trust it. We are very individualistic. We generally don't think of the systems that we're part of and we don't think of our organizations as living organisms. But in the Foodshed project, we're sensing we're all part of this living organism sensing different parts of the environment. There's so much psychological research that says we only interpret a very small part of our environment. It's very possible that somebody across the room sees something that I don't see. That happens over and over again. I assume, and the practices we are designing assume, that if that person is having such a strong reaction, they're seeing something and we're part of this larger system. We're stronger for that. I think as people experience that a few times they start to trust that more and give individuals more time to express themselves.

Anna Erwin: I am curious, how did you learn to think this way? I think it's a skill to learn to be empathetic to others' reservations in regard to decision-making. In addition, when thinking about systems change, many people are concentrated on environment, economy, and equity or social concerns. I think one of the missing links is governance. How do you argue on its behalf and how does it become part of the conversation? That's two parts, how do you think that way and how does governance become part of the conversation, in your experience?

Kunkler: I would love to hear your response to it, too, given your position in this Institute and your studies on governance. I'm going to start with that because most people don't want to have a conversation about governance. In fact, that relates to your first question in terms of how we do the skill building. Right now, this is a growing edge for me. I didn't start out as an educator and I've had to step into that role, through this path. That is a really good question, because some people are highly motivated. They are motivated by their value system. Right now, I look for people who share these values and I don't know how to answer the question for those who don't share values. We have to start, we have to move, that's the way I feel. We have this little window of time, we are trying to shift our relationship to the natural world, so that is a whole learning curve, right? That's the whole learning process of acknowledging that nature has a right to exist for its own sake and we need to relate to it accordingly, and not just as a commodity to be exploited. Treating each other similarly and developing our empathy to do so, is a whole learning curve in itself.

I think it's interesting, the nonviolent communication movement. I resonate a lot with the work and the challenges there. I think we're just in this transition time and it's very unpredictable about where this going to go. I see a growing number of allies and people who get it, who understand this method. My strategy is to just build a movement by continuing to draw in people who understand this that we live in Nature and that we must interact with one another on the basis of empathy. We're doing this all together in terms of shifting that awareness and that consciousness. That's a very new age way of thinking about the question, how do we shift? There's an approach and some practical skill building; I think learning how to do reflective listening is a key part of this need.

I am working with somebody right now who has got a really strong sense of the curriculum you would need to have before you could do consent-based governance. It involves being able to know some sort of reflective listening pattern. You have to be able actually to hear other people. With that comes capacity to recognize that people have different perspectives. A part of such training is some sort of training in racial equity. We really need to understand that, in order to have an equitable decision-making process, we have to understand the history that we're all coming to the table with. Then, we need to practice some sort of nonviolent communication. When you start to have a very transparent process, a lot of stuff is going to come up and it requires a lot of truth-telling. To really have a peaceful consent process, we need these communication skills. Then we can start to think about consent.

Garland Mason: Back to consent versus consensus. I was thinking about how you can ensure that the best possible decision is being made via consent. I could be wrong, but I feel that consensus almost has a few more safeguards in place to make sure that people are feeling like this is the best possible choice for this group or the best possible way to move forward. Whereas consent, in my mind, can more easily fall into the path of least resistance where people are within the range of tolerance, they may not think it's necessarily the best way to move forward, but it's not the worst. They're still in their range of tolerance. I was just wondering in your experience, how you deal with that to make sure that we're moving forward in a really productive way that we can also agree is the best way?

Kunkler: I'd be curious what you think about that. I am happy to answer that, but you have experienced these different methods.

Mason: Yes, and I think that sometimes the path of least resistance comes up when we're rushed. If given the luxury of time, I think that it can resemble more of a consensus process. If a consensus process is working out optimally, there's more dialogue and you won't get to the path of least resistance, because there is time to think of other options and put them on the table. When there isn't the luxury of time, it does sometimes feel like this decision is going to work because nobody's out of their range of tolerance. We might not all agree that it's the best decision to move forward, but it will get us somewhere. I think any decision-making process needs time and patience and, maybe that's where consent falls apart, just like any other decision-making process would where, if we're trying to be really expedient, it can't work as well because that's not how it was designed to work.

Kunkler: Yes, there's always that voice at the table, who says, this is not moving fast enough. One of the challenges for me personally is that I'm always trying to figure out how to balance that person in the group, because they're getting out of the range of tolerance. If we have too much process and we're talking about this for too long, they define one edge of the range of tolerance. Then your comments are suggesting the need to define the other edge, which is, have we really talked about this enough or have we thought about this from enough angles? Are we making a really good decision? That may be another thing you're balancing, those different points of view. I would say, it's like riding a bicycle, what you're talking about, and you're defining some of those edges, so that where you might search will not go out of the range of tolerance for some. In those cases, you wind up with a choice described later as something like: "We all made this decision, but it's not very inspiring."

Mason: Exactly, I'm thinking of a particular instance in our work where we were trying to think of a name for a project and we all acknowledged that the name wasn't necessarily that important to the work. We wanted to name it and we couldn't agree, and somebody just came up with the most neutral sounding name that we could all imagine, that we could all agree on, because, the name wasn't the most important part of the work and it was neutral enough that we weren't out of our range of tolerance. Unlikely that that was the best name, and I think with that decision-making process we eventually, through more time and dialogue, did come to a better name. I'm just thinking of that instance as that was definitely the path of least resistance, where

it wasn't the best decision, but it worked. Maybe that's exactly how it is designed to work.

Kunkler: Yes, that's the difference, because sometimes people say they think of governance and decision-making as the same thing, but they are different. So that a decision-making process occurs within a governance system, and that system would hopefully be based on some sort of continuous improvement. So, you would make that decision, knowing it's not the best one, but you're balancing inclusion with efficiency, always. I know, I wish we always had the luxury of time and we never do, so you're always balancing those different interests. With this process, what you'll do in the circle is you'll come back to that at some point and you'll say, how are we doing? In your example, you might say, "You know, that name, it's just not bringing us the kind of support that we need."

At some point that name is going to be out of the range of tolerance of someone in the group and someone will speak up and say, "We need a new strategy." I find this happens a lot where you pick a strategy, and a name is kind of a strategy. You pick a strategy because you need to move on to something, and you know it's not the most comprehensive strategy, but you pick it because you need to keep moving and what you want is a culture that's flexible, that is willing to come back to decisions over, and over, and over again. I think this is another piece where sometimes consensus dysfunctions, as people spend so much time to get to what they feel like is the most perfect decision that they don't want to revisit it anytime soon. Somebody wasn't there. Well, you missed it and we're not opening that decision. The balancing of, let's do this, it won't be perfect. Then it's in a process of continuous improvement so you know that you can always come back and revisit it and you know it'll be better in the future. It's like riding a bike. You know you're just constantly, you're never like straight on. It is not about finding the words, but it's that you know you're always maneuvering on the bike. You're never just kind of rigid and still. You're never really hitting that greatest solution, but you're always trying to weave in and out of it. Do you have experience with that in groups?

Rebecca Ligrani: I do have experience working with groups where we did not have the sort of process; and this was before I came to Virginia Tech, but it was more like we were on the bicycle path and we could never stay on the bicycle path. I have more experience with what has not worked.

I could see how learning these techniques would have been very helpful. I was working with pretty significant decisions. I felt like they were very important decisions to be made. It would have been so helpful to have a much clearer process, especially with people where the leadership was really, really vague and more than one person wanted to be a leader. I'm sure you have experienced that dynamic. This method seems like a way to maybe balance power, which is one of the problems I've seen in groups I've worked in. It also seems like a way not just to balance power, but to make decisions that everyone is a part of, not just work for people who are making decisions and then you are all in the group together, but you're not really making decisions as a group. That's been more my experience before I came to Virginia Tech, but I think this seems like a great method for balancing the voices engaged.

Kunkler: Thank you for sharing, because that's actually what brings me into governance work, too. It's the heartache of people who are trying to do something good and they want to and they get into the room together and you know that it's very complex, there's a lot of dynamics going on and power dynamics and personalities and stuff, and if we don't have a good container for that, it can get really crazy. I said that for me, it was like seeing some burnout experiencing that. I have come out of situations I feel like I know a thousand ways it doesn't work, like Thomas Edison. There are so many ways, so many pitfalls that groups can fall into.

Mason: In my experience, too, it was at the state government level with making policy, and it was with groups, their only shared goal was to make a policy or to make some writing. I'm not going to go in the details of what I was doing. I don't know exactly how it would work for those groups, yet, because there was such a range of ideological stances in the room. It was a constant awkward, tense feeling. I don't know how it would work for that. Anyway, that's just adding to that.

Morikawa: It really raises a question about, how do you spread alternative ways of governance? You know, kind of the contagion effect. What's your experience with spreading the idea and having enough groups and individuals out there who begin forming this idea of a critical mass to bring about that kind of change?

Kunkler: That's exactly what we're trying to create, a critical mass. I always

think back, I used to teach yoga when I got out of college and I think back to then. When I went out to San Francisco, I remember this moment when I started teaching, and a gym was offering a class and I remember thinking this is so progressive, that this gym is offering a yoga class. They're really forward thinking because, at the time, it was still kind of something that was a little bit weird, on the fringe, and a little funky, when I started. That was to me the first demonstration of, like, this is starting to mainstream a little bit. Of course, now it's a multi-billion-dollar industry and every gym has a yoga class.

I try to keep that in mind, that experience, as I reflect on where we are with this governance method. It's a little bit on the fringe. More alternative groups have started to embrace it first. It's hatching, I don't know enough about biology to know if it's spreading like a virus in a way, but it's like we plant seeds in organizations, like the Appalachian Foodshed Project. We're not even really using this whole governance system. We had a real quick-and-dirty training, I think over a teleconference, for a few hours to kind of get them started. People don't have a lot of time and they don't have a lot of time to learn about processes. That's been that edge, for me, of how do you help a group to start to use these tools and learn them enough to be able to use them effectively, but at the same time they have so little time that they're together, they really want to work on the content they've got business to do?

There's been a number of different places where this has spawned. We've been able to go out into other groups. We've been able to work in Appalachian Virginia and introduce some of these concepts there. Maybe at first, it's three people in a group of 10 who get it, who are just excited, who just say, this is something that could really work. We need to check this out. That's what's happening right now, and then those three people go out and later on I get a call, "I've been working with this new group now, can you come out and bring this material out?"

Now I've developed videos because I think that we need to be able to spread this, it needs to be a lot easier for people to consider and reflect on these concepts. We've spent a lot of time to try to consolidate a lot of material into a very short amount of time on the videos. That's going to help with orientation, it's going to help the group not have to talk about the process as much in the meeting, but just to kind of launch into their meetings with a shared understanding of the practices. I see it spreading. I guess what I

see also, is once people really light up with this method, they stay lit. It has been interesting and surprising to me to meet people a few years down the road who are still using these concepts and also trying to bring them to new groups. I feel really good about that.

I have chosen not to try to work with institutions and even not as much with boards of directors, although I still do. They're just a little bit more conservative, I guess. In that spectrum of the critical mass, the earlier adopters were still in the early adopter phase with these new governance practices. We're really just looking for those folks who are willing to try. I see that as people experience it and it works and they take it back into other contexts, we are going to be hitting that more mainstream point. I think soon.

What we're doing now is breaking down. We're not really honoring the systems that we're a part of. It's not a strategy that's going to work, to be in an organization and part of the circle but not really heard. So many people have that experience and there's a lot of good information that's lost. The business community, including Zappos for example, is also another place where these practices are starting to be picked up. There's another method, holacracy, that's grounded in the same, it's kind of a spin off from sociocracy, that method is starting to penetrate some of the high-tech companies.

Morikawa: Software developers like it.

Kunkler: Software developers do, because they're looking for methods where they can be a lot more agile. Yes, they know. They use a lot of team processes. They need to have that kind of engagement from different voices. It helps them to realize that whole agile idea, what we're trying to do with this government governance method. It goes back to what you're saying is, let's make a decision, let's get that efficiency, let's try it, and let's just know we can continue to improve that; it was our alpha test; this is our beta test.

This is really a very big cultural shift, I think, for a lot of organizations to be comfortable with beta testing, to start to put something out that's not completely cooked, so that they can get feedback, so that then they can create something that really works. It's very hard, especially, I work a lot with nonprofits. The foundation community doesn't like to support multiple failures as a process to get to success.

Morikawa: Which is unfortunate, isn't it? I mean, funding failure is good.

Kunkler: Yes, it is. It's like we know what didn't work. We have to test things.

Morikawa: Exactly and not be afraid.

Kunkler: Yeah, otherwise you're not going to take risks. You're not going to be innovative if you can't take risks and fail; you won't be able to innovate.

Morikawa: How about you in your work with nonprofits? What are your feelings about the role of a facilitator and the role of the chair? Should or could they be the same person? Is there a benefit by separating them and what's the relationship between the two?

Kunkler: I just have to laugh because I know there are so few people in my world that want to have that conversation. But I think about that a lot, and actually I think that's a really important distinction. Many times, the role of the chair is really kind of the leader of that board. They're helping to make sure that group is fulfilling its purpose, is on track, is clear what its purpose is, and that people are accountable for what they say they're going to do. It's a really important role. Sometimes groups have facilitators and they forget that there's a vacuum in that role. Especially, when you talk about consensus groups, I see this as another one of those things that happens when those groups have a facilitator and they're using a consensus process, but there's a vacuum of leadership, the person who is bottom-lining the group's effectiveness.

Chairs also are often the face of that group to the outside world and they have a very strong public relations role, and you can do all of that without necessarily facilitating the meetings. Not all chairs who are good at some of these functions are also good at facilitation. Facilitation, again, if a group is going to be able to move forward, it's very helpful to have somebody in that role.

In the Circle Forward method, we actually have two different roles. We have something called an operational leader or a chair, and a facilitator. They can be held by the same person or they can be held by two different people. I'm on a board of directors right now and we're experimenting with these methods and we've chosen to separate those roles. I did not want to be the chair, but people wanted to have more experience with this method, so

I'm actually the vice chair or vice president. I facilitate all the meetings and it's been great actually. I love working with a chair who is happy to turn over the facilitation of the meetings and setting the agendas. Of course, he participates in that, but he's happy not to have to facilitate the meetings. There are so many other roles that he's playing that I didn't want to play. There's a lot of responsibility that goes along with it, so it's working really nicely. I think people are comfortable with the idea that you can separate us and our roles. I think this arrangement is making it OK for the chair not to facilitate meetings. I think sometimes that taking on that role might be a hard thing maybe for some.

Morikawa: It could be an ego problem for some people.

Kunkler: Well yes, I wasn't going to say that, but yes it could.

Ligrani: I'm wondering how you think your work is going to transition us from this black industrial image to this green idyllic stage once the economic and political structures we have possibly collapsed.

Kunkler: I don't think we're going to have the green idyllic.

Ligrani: No, I think it's probably just an idea to which we can always aspire.

Kunkler: I think that's a vision that does what visions are supposed to do, which is, that inspires us to keep working, but I was almost going to say something about that. We have no idea what that future looks like. It probably doesn't look like that. It probably isn't going to look exactly like that. That's what's so fascinating about working in complex systems and you all might experience this. It's that you're constantly walking into the unknown. I feel like I'm always on the edge now. I'm not operating in that safe zone. I'm not doing what's been done, tried, and true. As soon as you start to do systems work, you're not doing the tried and true anymore, in most cases. I mean, you can turn it into that, but if you're really looking for new relationships across sectors, you're going to hit places that feel really vulnerable and hard. You're going to hit places where you don't know what to do next. I think that's what it means to be in that gap.

Right now, I think when we're really fully awake, we realize we are on a learning curve. I don't know anybody that's not on a learning curve right now. People change so quickly. In my work, I have days where I leave meetings and

it feels like, this is great. We've come to a resolution, we know what we're doing now, everybody's clear, and we all go out of the room high-fiving each other. Then, two months later it's like, frustration.

Your question about the future: I just want to be knowing that I'm doing something that is valuable. I have a very strong conviction that how we relate to each other matters, how we make decisions matters. I think we can all agree that if a decision is going to affect somebody that they should be part of making that decision. If they are going to be affected, they should be there at the table. That's not the way it works now. For me, it's, I believe that if we can, there's a Law of Requisite Variety, from Ross Ashby, and it says if you're going to steer a system, you need all the parts of the system represented in the steering mechanism. If you're going to steer your community, you need all the different perspectives. You don't need everybody at the table, but you need all those perspectives there, otherwise it's going to careen wildly out of control. You need all those perspectives there.

I believe this, in the same way that I believe in gravity or I believe in natural systems. It's just a call to service at that point. It's like, well then, I'm going to do the best I can to bring about that world, and you do that without any guarantees. You do that without a lot of sense of safety and you do that with a lot of vulnerability. I do that. I'm an introvert, but I'm up in front of groups a lot. I work with my own edges. I'm doing that because it's the right thing to do, because this moment now is so critical. How else am I going to spend my life if I'm a very service-oriented person? I see a lot of magic and I don't want to make this solo. I do see a lot of things that are bigger than me, that are also converging. I'm not doing this by myself. That is a myth. That's actually a terrible myth, that we have to do this alone. Instead, what I actually see is lot of convergence. It's like that Goethe poem, like when you move, the universe moves with you, or whatever. It's true. It really works that way.

Erwin: And maybe sometimes, we are in both worlds of the same time, where we have pockets of the more utopian idyllic world, but we also have the reality of what's happening, let's say, in Baltimore right now. It has to be able to handle all of that going on at the same time, that's something else to think about, too.

Kunkler: I think that is the world we are in. We're in transition, and the

ground is rocking and things aren't as stable. I mean, how do you experience that?

Ligrani: I don't know the way to put it, but it's like we're trying to build these little lifeboats, like alternative systems, so if the big ship does hit the iceberg, or however you might want to say it, we do have these lifeboats that we can rebuild from, and we don't know what that's going to look like, but to at least have those in place, to have some sort of resilience in the larger systems collapse, it's kind of what this work can do.

Kunkler: I think that's a really good metaphor. That's what it feels like. This work is a bit like preparing for an oak tree's fall. We're planting little seeds so that when the big oak tree falls, there will be this growth. It makes sense to me.

Ligrani: It kind of feels like we can't change those bigger structures right now. We just have to do what we can in these smaller areas.

Mason: I think I do that. I go about it a little bit differently. I try as hard as I can to work with alternative systems and building them, and I also think that I put myself in uncomfortable places of working with the larger systems as much as possible, too, just because I think that's also just, especially because I want to work with, let's say, farm workers or something like that, who are, many of them, their life is, let's say, dictated by the state and market in many ways. Especially if they're illegal or they're a labor contractor. So I think there's that dual work of like working on the ground and also working with these big questions of citizenship or regulation or whatever it is, and it's just not as comfortable for me. But I think that's something else that we all do implicitly or explicitly. We all do it.

Morikawa: What lies ahead for the Appalachian Foodshed Project. Some next steps?

Kunkler: Do you want to take that on with me, Garland?

Mason: I'll take it on with you. The reality is that our funding ends in less than a year. We've been almost like building lifeboats or planting seeds for when the U.S.D.A. funding ends. The end of U.S.D.A. funding will be sort of like the oak tree falling and then there's hopefully a lot of local efforts that are interlinked that will pick up and grow larger and actually will form more of

a critical mass than the U.S.D.A. funding could have ever let us create. That's the way I see it.

I have a vision, that I'm not sure if it's totally keyed into reality, but I sort of envision that when the U.S.D.A. funding ends, university partners will start taking more of a backseat and our community stakeholders will sort of take on the driver's role in steering the process forward. I think that they've already made great strides toward positioning themselves to be able to do that. I think actually, the loss of funding might put them in a better position to be able to do that, to start garnering their own funding that allows them to take some of the power and realize their own goals. Maybe they're not the same goals that the university partners would have had, but they are the goals that are important to the community stakeholders who are doing this work and who are going to be driving. It's a question, I think, of where the funding comes from next. That is also going to have a huge impact on the way the work takes shape, which in some ways is unfortunate. It is the reality often in this type of work.

Kunkler: There's a group that is looking for that right now, that is thinking about those next steps afterwards and how to move forward. There are a number of new relationships and people have ties now across state lines that they didn't have and they have a vision for working across political boundaries, I think, that that they didn't have before. I'm going to be curious to see whether that orientation and its associated relationships can be sustained.

Mason: It's hard to tell sometimes where the role of the university fits into this work, because sometimes it seems the stakeholders could do it independently in a way. The university is helpful for a lot of the logistics, a lot of the nitty-gritty details that those community stakeholders wouldn't be paid to do. So, tenured faculty at the university can sort of pick up that slack and find a graduate research assistant to make that work happen that people in the community don't have time to do, or don't have an interest in doing, because it's not the most interesting work that feels like you're moving forward every day, but it's sort of the background work that needs to occur for the big stuff to happen.

Kunkler: It's a huge role in the collective impact it has. They call it the backbone organization and these kind of multi-stakeholder initiatives need

somebody who is doing the communications, the administrative work that holds the group together and that is a huge role. We talked at one point about the university being the pre-vertebra of the collaborative. University representatives didn't want to be the backbone, but they were like the evolutionary stuff before the backbone. Finding that, identifying those organizations that want to hold this network together and helping to foster those relationships will be an important piece for the group in the future. I'm not even sure whether people realize how much is going to go away because of what the universities are providing.

Mason: I suppose there is still the possibility that funding will allow that work to continue at the university level. I think there are a lot of community stakeholders, though, who see themselves taking on that role in the future. Maybe, they are not right now in the best position to do that, just for a lack of resources and lack of staff, but in the next few years they might be able to build to make that transition. It's definitely a question mark right now, but there's no question that the work will continue; it's just a matter of how that will take shape and who will take on the various roles, because I think that there will be a lot of shifts, probably for the better.

Kunkler: One thing that I'm hoping as well, I think, is more programs like this, bringing out this circle structure, for those organizations and community partners that have a little bit more of an intentional structure that are formed. We have in our county a Food Policy Council. It's an entity, there's a membership. There's some intentional network forming starting to happen, like you all are doing here in Virginia, I think, that is going to start to solidify this food systems network more and more in the region and throughout the state. My purpose is to help people to see that you can have those circles. Those circles can be autonomous, in control of their own budgets, have memberships, initiatives, and strategies, but that you can also have an organizational structure using a principle of double linking, where you can be linking then with other circles.

You can keep that in the same way that your circulatory system operates, your arteries take blood out to the extremities and then you have veins that bring the blood back to the heart. You can create that same kind of structure. You have a lot of decentralized processes that are going on along that chain, but we can create that same kind of organism across geographic regions with this double linking principle. We can continue to have that influence

and information flow built into the structure that doesn't replace all the other ways that networks communicate because they're so many. I think that sometimes it's like the connective tissue, there's so much connective tissue that needs to be in place for networks to be healthy, but this is just one more level of support. A structural channel is kind of part of what I'm trying to do now. It involves kind of just getting the word out so people know that they have that opportunity if they choose it.

Morikawa: Enter the double linking.

Kunkler: That double linking, I think of it as Lego blocks or something, but that we can connect in a way that doesn't create any kind of dominating hierarchy. It's very hard, maybe you all talk about this, too. Have you noticed it's really the disconnect between what's going on at the local level, and when you have regional or state levels, it's very hard for that to work? You have these regional or state-level efforts, and they always feel like they can't get the grassroots voice, or if they get the grassroots voice, the grassroots participants are always just like, are we getting our piece in our county, and that's what they feel like their role is, to be there and getting their piece. So, I think the structure is one that has the potential to help people who want to work locally continue to work locally, but still have a channel to regional, state, and larger efforts, still have a voice and a consenting voice, so that we can actually be moving at the local level and at the state level, we can be working together. We can mobilize when we need to, and we can be decentralized at the same time.

Erwin: I just think that, any way that the state and the national level can learn more from the local and vice versa, I think would be a definite step forward. It is in contrast to, let's say, the forum method, where you go and you say what you want, or you say yes. I mean, it takes training on both sides because when you say what you want at the forum level, there's not always an understanding from the representative of what exactly you're trying to say. So, it's training on both sides, but it's in contrast to that method. A different method of working together to make consent-based decisions would be a big step forward. I think it's important to work at this at the local level in organizations and with people like Tracy or other leaders in this field, doing facilitation trainings at the state level, because they have to be on board and they have to understand the value of it, I think. before both can combine, because I don't see either of them going away for a while.

And I don't see either of them not having a huge effect on each other. I don't always like it, but that's just the way it is, and so there have to be forward-thinking yet approachable, thoughtful, reflective people working at both levels, and I think that's really important and then I think once they all are speaking the same language, you can kind of bridge that.

Kunkler: I think so, and I think there's a real willingness to undertake such work. I see a number of state-level coalitions that want that outcome. They know they need that, especially in advocacy work, for example, when you've got coalitions that are really wanting to mobilize a movement. So, the food system is perfect for that. How do you mobilize? There are so many different initiatives going on, and how do you get them all to kind of move as an organism, move in a common direction? They do, but I think it could be really powerful when I think about the geographic scope of the Appalachian Foodshed Project. If that foodshed was organized around some common agendas, they would be a huge force, a huge voice, and especially if they were going in such a way that the local communities felt brought in, they felt like their interests were being taken into account, that they were really being taken into account, and the numbers of participants would just be phenomenal.

In North Carolina, our state food Council is taking direction from local food councils. They have a process where they're setting their agenda based on what they're hearing coming up. What double linking allows is that process goes two ways. Nobody has to take a back seat; the state can listen to the local communities. The local communities can also shape a state-level strategy. The state would also, at the same time, have links to the local communities, a voice, a channel, that would be influencing what's happening at the local level as well. It's two directions. We were so used to top-down systems, sometimes people feel like they're going to lose if the state level comes in and starts telling us what to do at our local level. That's not what it is, it's a bigger picture perspective, when the local initiative has that larger perspective with consent helping to shape strategy, it helps a local community then fit into something much larger than itself. Not forced, not steamrolled, but by consent, they are able to shape their direction together. Likewise, when that local person is sitting at the state level, for example, and helping to determine the next steps, when you have that two-way going on all the time, you really come out with something that's working on all sides.

It's not going to be without conflict. I was with somebody yesterday, just reminding all of us, conflict is not a bad thing. Conflict is fear, is part of the process, and it's very normal. It can be resolved. We can work through it, and we can actually work together better.

Chapter 12: Jeanette Abi-Nader

Jeanette Abi-Nader, Executive Director of the City School Yard Garden project in Charlottesville, Virginia

Date of Interview: February 22, 2017

Interviewers: Pallavi Raonka, Heather Lyne, Lorien MacAuley

Lorien MacAuley: One of the first things that we wanted to learn was if you could just share a little bit about your background and why you undertook food justice work.

Jeanette Abi-Nader: I think, like most people, my interest in food started with my family. We're a Lebanese-American family, which immigrated here. Many of our family gatherings and the things that were at the heart of who we were as a family were around our food and our culture. That's always been sort of an essential value to me. When I was in college, I studied social work and community development. I really came to feel, how could you work on bettering schools without making sure that the kids have food to eat, and that they were not hungry? I went on a quest to learn how food was grown and farmed for many years, practicing in different scenarios. It was always sort of this combination of using farming as a tool for community building or using agriculture in that way. That's a little bit of my personal background. I then worked with the Community Food Security Coalition that focuses on programs and projects across the nation that are helping to build food security.

Heather Lyne: Jeanette, can you share the story of how Whole Measures for Community Food Systems came into being?

Abi-Nader: The Community Food Security Coalition worked in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Food Projects program, which was a grants program that funded programs across the country doing work to both address issues around hunger, around the loss of family farms, of farming, and around poverty in our communities, multiple complex approaches. They funded maybe 100 projects a year and were looking for a way to gauge the impact of all those projects across the country. They

worked with our nonprofit to help create an evaluation tool, which emerged as Whole Measures for Community Food Systems.

It started out as just looking across the country at all the things that people were doing in diverse programs and tracking them: the number of pounds of food that was being grown locally, the farmers' markets that were involved. The folks in the community said, "These numbers don't really tell the story of what we're doing. What we're doing is the relationship between those numbers." We paired up with Whole Communities, which is an organization in Vermont, that had somewhat of a framework like this, called Home Measures and worked for two years to develop a community food systems version of that tool. We went and talked with folks who know all different kinds of programs and came to believe that the whole food system is encompassed by the six fields that Whole Measures addresses: justice and fairness, strong communities, private funds, healthy people, sustainable ecosystems, and thriving local economies. We then worked to create a storytelling mechanism, so it's based on dialogue and values as a way of telling stories, to vision and evaluate Community Change.

Pallavi Raonka: What are the various obstacles that you have confronted, mobilizing communities around issues of food justice?

Abi-Nader: So much of the work that I did with the Community Food Security Coalition is happening now in Charlottesville. Various people mobilizing, I wouldn't say I mobilize folks, but it is happening out there. One of the core tenets of Whole Measures is justice and fairness. It was developed with the understanding that you could have healthy food, you could have healthy people, but unless you were looking at the institutional and structural barriers of race and poverty that were keeping that from being accessible and available to all people in the community, it wasn't valid. We decided to include fairness and justice as a central field of Whole Measures, as well as a practice, the way that you implement it.

Some of those obstacles involve a couple of things. One, when you're working in the nonprofit world around making community change, many nonprofits emerged out of the dominant culture frame. How do you work with a nonprofit that has a service model, say around hunger, providing emergency food, which is really important, but not necessarily creating justice? How do you work with those social service type groups to create social change?

In making a transition between that outlook and larger systemic change? And doing it in a way that people have a voice and a decision? That is part of what food justice is. Obstacles are entrenched patterns of dominant culture, ways of doing things. We are facing larger barriers in terms of agribusiness, a larger system of economics that is there to support a broader base agriculture. We are providing resources so that community members can have an equal voice, have the time, the ability to access, to be part of the conversation.

MacAuley: By way of digging deeper into your last point, I wanted to share that when I first came here to (Virginia) Tech, I worked with a group, the Dan River Partnership for Healthy Communities. It was sort of a university public-private partnership. It was a community-based participatory research project. We were trying to implement programs that addressed issues of health and nutrition, but doing so in a consensus form with community. We weren't working through Whole Measures, but we had these other processes we were working through. One of the things that I felt a bit challenging was that you do have this raft of institutions working together and they are coming from this dominant framework. For example, we sought to evaluate the state of people's nutrition in the Dan River region, in the community. Most people could only think about nutrition in the sense of, we are going to teach people how to eat right, without addressing the systemic problems. We had all sorts of offers to teach and have all these education programs. Even working with communities, even working with a number of other people and institutions, these were still the only proposed solutions that could emerge out of this work. I'm wondering, in your work with Whole Measures, if you've ever confronted these kinds of challenges with this consensus process, in and of itself, trying to get all people to agree, even agree on the problem and then to try to agree on a solution? Do you have any stories you'd like to share related to that?

Abi-Nader: I imagine that you can even speak more, from this experience. I think so much of it has to do with who's at the table in the first place. Which table is it? Which community are you in? And where are you gathering? One of the things that we've seen is that starting at a place of values, starting with the expression of what you care about in your food system, is a good connector and having a shared story around that. Then moving from there to dialogues and stories around what people's history with food are. I often

speak to my Lebanese-American ancestry and why food matters to me, why it matters to my family in that way. I think each family, and each individual has their own story.

I will just share one story about a group in the Northeast and the way that they used Whole Measures. The youth leader at that time there worked with a group of youths to use the Whole Measures frame, and each month they looked at one of the fields. They asked, “What do healthy people look like in my community?” They took cameras and they went out there for me and they took pictures. There was this really informative process of hearing the kids’ voices over a period of time, getting them to capture images of what it meant to them, putting it together. They did that for each of the fields. They actually changed the language of the tool because it didn’t resonate with them. The language is academic. It didn’t have meaning. They changed the language to suit them. They came back, after this period of reflecting on their community and what it looked like, taking pictures, reporting on that, with some suggestions concerning how they’d like to see that change.

I think the way you look at consensus is more than just from the people in the room and saying, let’s decide on this. It’s going through these individual projects of giving people the opportunity to have their opinions emerge and then coming to the table. Do you have groundwork first before you come to a table and say, let’s all decide on what thing you want to happen.

MacAuley: I’m hearing that part of consensus is coming together really to do a shared project. It’s not just talking about something. It’s sort of working through an implementation of a shared project.

Abi-Nader: Yes. The way we have used Whole Measures, it isn’t necessarily about the formal consensus, where you put three fingers up if you fully agree and you’re on board. You know, that kind of thing. I think it’s more about telling stories together and then seeing what emerges from that. That is at least, with Whole Measures, is how it is meant to be.

Lyne: Building on that process, what strategies would you suggest for maintaining momentum towards progress, when you’ve dealt with a really divisive issue in a community?

Abi-Nader: I’m not sure. Maybe can I just reflect it back to you a little bit? I don’t really see consensus as a core piece of this. Can you tell me what you’re

thinking? I don't really know whether we have used consensus to deal with divisive issues.

Lyne: We're building off a conception of participatory governance that typically involves consensus, at least what I've seen academically. You can speak to maybe how you've done it differently or what participatory governance means to you. That would be helpful.

Abi-Nader: Why don't you start by telling me what participatory governance is?

Lyne: Participatory governance is a process whose intention is to be very inclusive and the idea is that everyone's bringing up their ideas in a productive and interactive environment. Hopefully, you are able to keep the momentum going in that. I think it sort of mirrors deliberative democracy, the idea that everyone's coming and having a discussion. I think that correlates with the storytelling that you've been mentioning.

Abi-Nader: I don't think I'll be able to speak to that well. Of course, the process of engaging the community, to define what you want for your food system, can be divisive. I've seen examples around the country where folks have had those conversations and there are stumbling blocks. Using those academic terms, they don't really have meaning in terms of what it's like on the ground. It's more like a process of working on projects together, building a vision, that kind of thing.

Lyne: My mom and my stepdad, who is a chef actually, worked for a time in Denver at a nonprofit food bank. They were helping to advise folks who were on the SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) program, as to how to buy healthier food with what SNAP was providing. They also worked in a collective way, by sharing different cooking techniques with those groups as well. Do you have anything like that, that you have incorporated into the Whole Measures food system? Like the cooking education part of it?

Abi-Nader: Yeah. The program in Charlottesville that I worked with, City Schoolyard Garden, was really founded on exposing youths to using the garden as a living laboratory, to both enhance their academic learning, to build nutritional knowledge and to learn cooking skills. There's lots of

different ways that we interact with youths. And there are other organizations in Charlottesville that work at a more adult level.

For example, we have a camp in the summer called The Garden to Table Camp. Youths spend their morning in the garden, harvesting, weeding, doing whatever garden work there is. Then they take whatever they have harvested to one of our partners, the PB&J Fund, which is a teaching kitchen. They get a recipe and they cook it there. That's one example of working with youth at one level, on what's grown from the garden. This is our focus. We also have a harvest-of-the-month program. Each month, we profile a locally sourced vegetable or fruit from local growers. We share it across schools to 2,500-plus youths in the school district. With it, we also have posters and materials that have recipes and nutrition information around that. Just by exposing the youths to the food, over and over again, there's more of a familiarity with it, and more of a likelihood to eat it and cook it as well.

Raonka: During my work in India on food security, the communities I was working with strongly rejected this idea of globalization or capitalism, or even any form of outside intervention coming in. I was wondering if you found any similar patterns with the communities you worked with? Also do you see any correlation between sustainability and these communities actually rejecting the idea of globalization, because there's a lot of emphasis on local food and communities doing it by themselves? How does it work?

Abi-Nader: I think India is such a leader in this area, in terms of this grassroots, really dynamic movement that has been going on for years. I haven't seen anything quite similar in the United States. There's definitely a lot of investment in the local food community and heightening that, but not at a level where it's politicized and has the power that I've seen in so many of the Indian communities. It is a great example of that. Charlottesville, for example, was voted one of the healthiest cities in the country. It has a very strong local food community. Bringing some of the issues that you're speaking to, the impact that local food has on climate change, the impact that it has for food justice, is I think, one of our challenges. Broadening the definition of what it means to be a food leader, to have a local food system, to include those kinds of concepts, is really critical. We are doing it at a very small-scale. Do you want to share any stories about how and what you saw in your research? Because I think the community activism that's happening in India could be an amazing example for the United States.

Raonka: The communities I worked with practiced subsistence agriculture. For them, subsistence agriculture means you only grow as much you need for the whole year. There is no idea of accumulation of wealth. That means any form of hybrid seeds, genetically modified seeds, and stuff like that, were consciously rejected by the communities because they needed more investment, in terms of fertilizer, pesticides, and irrigation, which is not something you find too easily in Third World countries and among people who practice subsistence agriculture. The land sizes are almost near to landless. The communities automatically say, when companies like Monsanto started coming in, “We’re aware that this is something that would not work with us.” They knew this even before any sort of outside interventions had occurred in their areas. The communities were well aware that, “if we want to survive, we have to practice this. Then if you have to practice this, we can’t accept these genetically modified seeds.” These communities already had the practice of using seed banks and similar initiatives.

I’m talking about a region which has a malnourishment rate higher than sub-Saharan African countries and is also going through a violent insurgent movement. These kinds of communities also have a history of resistance, along with a history of oppression and betrayal, so the scenario is very different. That was one part of my research. The other part was this. In terms of implementation of food policies, of food programs, what I found was, which was really interesting, is when we talk about participatory governance, when the communities are involved in implementation, better implementation resulted.

For instance, about the hunger programs, we have in India something like a midday meal, which has been highly successful. If you are part of a government school, you get free hot meals. What happened was that a lot of push from civil society persuaded the government to provide painted food menus to the schools. The kids were asking, “Oh Friday, today’s Friday, I’m supposed to get an egg.” Then the child goes to the principal, “Where is my egg today? Why am I only given rice?” These things actually led to better implementation. Such schemes actually served as a lifeline in that area.

Abi-Nader: I think that speaks so much to community power. There are examples of that happening all over the United States, too. In terms of Detroit, for example, there is lots of emphasis on urban agriculture and having a Food Policy Council that focuses on addressing some of the

inequities in the food system. I think there are a lot of different initiatives that are happening and building momentum in a way that's not directly related to combating globalism, but is building a local connection to food and vibrancy and community voice, from the ground up.

Raonka: Yes, the same thing that people might not directly be aware of. This is like those I interviewed in India who were saying, "we are rejecting this. We don't want genetically modified seeds. We don't want outside intervention, like a World Bank project or a hydroelectric dam." That is great to learn. I am so excited.

MacAuley: You said that Charlottesville was voted one of the nation's healthiest communities. That is so interesting and actually I'm not surprised. Let's talk a little bit about your work in Charlottesville. It's funny because you would put Charlottesville in the category of being a very foodie city. Years ago, I had the opportunity to be involved in this Food, Not Bombs, project in Charlottesville. We would glean food, such as day-old bagels from a bakery, cook them into meals and bring them to a park in one of the low-income neighborhoods in Charlottesville.

Abi-Nader: Yeah, that's still happening.

MacAuley: Yes, that's great that they're still doing that. But I know that having reflected on that since, there are quite a few layers of what I'd call white privilege, in that style of intervention, even though it's attempting to directly address an unjust system. You had said that you have a lot of issues with people who may embrace this dominant ideology without even knowing or without even thinking about it. I'm wondering if you've ever experienced talks, maybe in planning an intervention or something, where you realize there are some layers of privilege that we need to work through

Abi-Nader: Yes, all the time. I think that's part of the reason why several organizations pulled together and formed the Charlottesville Food Justice Network. The City Schoolyard Garden started out with the idea that we wanted to have gardens for all the schools, which is a really simple, clean idea. You go and you build a garden in the school and you say, "This is available to everyone." But just saying that doesn't make it available to everyone. There are so many barriers to kids being able to access the garden. Having that sort of that lens through which you can look and say, "What are

the things that we have to do to make sure that it is accessible to all? What does that mean?" That's in our picture.

We started to build, partner together, network together with other organizations, so that we could have those conversations together. We want to find out, as this organization that focuses specifically on schoolyard gardens and education, how we can collaborate with the International Rescue Committee, that has this New Roots program, where they help do gardening and farming and entrepreneurial projects with new refugees. How can we collaborate with them or how can we connect with the local food hub consortium of local farmers, to address some of the issues and take it a little bit deeper? We're just starting on that path in terms of having the conversations, of defining collaboratively what food justice looks like. We've spent a year having that conversation, defining it. We really need to look at how much of the community voice has been part of that process. Our next focus is taking it deeper with those participating going into our communities and having those conversations with community members, to really enrich the process and decide what action steps to take.

Lyne: Can you walk us through the process of when you're first approaching someone to talk about food issues and food justice in your community? Like a cold call, you're first going out into the community, how do you begin that conversation? What have you found that people respond to?

Abi-Nader: For us, we have an easy entry with the students, because you work with them every day. We're bringing them to the garden and so we use the garden as the vehicle for those conversations and we start to talk about this with the students, e.g., the history of food. For the very young, we might talk about George Washington Carver and his role. Of course, there is Thomas Jefferson, and Monticello is right there. There's so much that we can talk about in terms of Thomas Jefferson's influence on agriculture, but more important than Thomas Jefferson's influence was the people who he had as slaves on his property, who were doing the farming. We tell those stories and bring those characters to student groups. That is how we do it, with the really young kids.

As the students get older, we start to look at more issues around justice, visiting local farms that have been part of the food system for a long time and begin to question: Where is local food in your neighborhood? Where do you

see food? We do a similar kind of photo project that I just mentioned that one of the kids did, asking students the questions: Where can they access healthy food? Why do you think a neighborhood is cut off from healthy food? Then you go back into the history of the city and its planning choices. That's how we work with the older students.

In the community, we partner with the Urban Agricultural Collective of Charlottesville. Todd Niemeier is the farmer there and they grow food in one of our low-income housing developments. They have a market, and so they grow food collaboratively and what they grow is shared at the market. At the market, the growers have questions: "What food are the people picking up? What food do they like? Does this food matter to them? Will they cook it?" Just being in the community and starting that conversation within it.

Then we become more formal and review the Whole Measures frame with one of our partners, the New Roots program, that I mentioned earlier. At their international festival, they showed images of each of the fields that Whole Measures has and they invited folks who were attending to come up and think about "What do you think about healthy people? What does that mean to you? What does the picture of a healthy person look like? How is that connected to farming?" It's just having that conversation in the community, where people are, where they're celebrating and getting together around food.

Lyne: Definitely, I think everyone can connect with that.

Raonka: Yes, everything boils down to eating food and surviving.

Abi-Nader: Yes. And that is a common denominator amongst all of us.

Raonka: When I moved from India to the United States, I felt like people here kind of forget. Work is such an item here. Ultimately, all that we do is to survive and eating food is a very important component of that. We don't even take our time to eat lunch or dinner properly, or to cook. I was wondering, how do race and gender interplay when you work with communities?

Abi-Nader: Specifically, around food, access, and justice? Part of understanding those dynamics that feed into food and security in a community is a very personal story. In Charlottesville, what we're trying to do is take the time to understand the history of our community and how

those factors came into effect. When you start to look at that, you start to see the divisions by race, just in the schools, when they were segregated. Charlottesville, in particular, has a big history there, in that after Virginia schools were desegregated in our community, they didn't hold school for a whole year in the city. White families wouldn't bring their kids to school where black students were.

Just looking at some of that historical context around food as well as access to many of the small businesses that were in the community, the African-American owned small businesses, when development came into our downtown areas, those businesses were razed and taken down. Look at the history first, as a way to understand where your community is now. Look at health disparities and understand the pattern behind those, which are a lot of times along racial lines.

I'm stepping back a little bit. You mentioned gender as well, looking internationally. In America, the typical stereotype of a farmer is of a man with a straw hat and overalls. But internationally, women are, I think, the majority of farmers around the world. Just challenge these stereotypes through understanding and knowledge and research.

Raonka: Let's talk about food security and food-secure homes, specifically in terms of female-headed households and single mothers. Can you elaborate on how you work to help to make these households food secure?

Abi-Nader: In the case of the City School Garden, I don't know that we're making an impact on making food households secure. I think what we're doing is building capacity among youths to care about that, for the long term. What we're doing is, we're planting that long-term seed. We're not really about food access. We're involved in food education and using that as a tool. But I think that it's definitely a seed for that in the future. The students do get to take the food home from the gardens. There are so many little notes like that, that I think go into making the change that you're discussing. Some of our partners are doing that through growing food directly or growing urban agriculture or making C.S.A. (Community Supported Agriculture) shares more accessible to families, providing recipes for parents, cooking lessons, all of those things.

MacAuley: Jeanette, you remind me of this other thing that I wanted to ask.

I've always believed that in our community food work, we should be bringing together the producer side and the consumer side, how you produce food, how it's commercially grown, sold, processed and distributed, that has a pretty big impact on the consumer side, on whether we're eating nutritious healthy foods, and whether such is available to all communities. I've been involved in efforts before that involved farmers and sought to increase what I would call agricultural literacy, how literate you are in the way that food is grown and produced. I'm wondering if you've involved farmers and, if so, how you've involved them in your work?

Abi-Nader: Again, in our partnerships that happens a lot. We do host, at the middle school and as soon as you get to high school, we do have farm field trips, which is wonderful. I cannot describe how much fun it is to go with 40 urban middle schoolers to a local farm and just watch them experience it. We began that as an opportunity to show them that what we're doing at a really small scale at our school is what it looks like out there, at a working farm. That's been a great opportunity to make these connections for the youth themselves. On a more systems level, we aim to purchase from local growers for the harvest-of-the-month program. We aim to decide now what our crops for the next academic school year will be, so that we can connect, be part of the local food hub. We are trying to build that capacity, little by little through procurement, sourcing and creating. We are supporting the school to make that easier. There are so many regulations and technicalities involved in a local school system, so that procuring locally can be challenging. We are helping to break down those barriers through this process, to build a local farming movement.

Lyne: What funding sources have you used, other than the U.S.D.A, to facilitate some of these school field trips? Who has been helping a lot? Have the parents or the general food justice network that you mentioned earlier helped?

Abi-Nader: That's a good point. Part of the reason why we started to have conversations with the network is because many of us were applying for the same grants. We found ourselves in conversations like, "What are you going to do tonight? Oh, we're going to apply for a grant. Oh yeah, me, too." We all kind of have the same proposals, so we sought to determine how we could collaborate. It's challenging, not only for us, in terms of how we create our programs, integrating them, collaborating together, but from a funder

perspective as well. We asked ourselves, “How can you fund systems change? How do you fund collaboration across networks? How important is it to do so?”

We are very fortunate to be supported by an array of sources. We do have federal funding for a short period, through the Farm to School and the Community Food Projects grants at City Schoolyard Garden. We also have many local foundations in Charlottesville that are extremely generous and excited about investing and engaging, using nature and individual donations. That’s always a part of it. Together that makes the whole mix of how you build an organization. I think that’s pretty common among most of the nonprofits in our area. And I forgot to mention that the city schools also support our work. The city of Charlottesville, as well as the Charlottesville City schools, both invest in the programs and in the gardens, not only with cash, but also through significant partnerships. These include printing things, working with the department of parks and recreation, caring for the land around where you grow. It’s very collaborative.

Raonka: Talking about funds and the implementation of these programs, I was wondering if your group has experienced or has been able to effect any form of change in laws and policies?

Abi-Nader: That’s a great question. We haven’t gone there yet. We haven’t. Well that’s not exactly true. At the school level, there definitely have been some policy shifts. Charlottesville City schools is an example, and it’s not just because of us. They’re interested in it, on their own. Parents are interested in it. They’ve been moving forward. They have a student health advisory board. They have a wellness policy that each year they’re investing in. The school has those smaller scale policies. We haven’t really addressed the city level policies yet, but we want to move towards that, once we build a really clear articulation of what food justice looks like to us. Do you have examples? Have you seen that work here?

MacAuley: Yes, in my previous work with the Department of Social Services. I don’t know if you’ve heard of Project Discovery. It’s up in the city of Alexandria and it’s more a college preparatory program. My role in that, before I came back to grad school, was to work with T.C. Williams High School students and to design community service opportunities for them. For me, it was, of course, via a community garden! It was great to go through

a little bit of that, with them as well, how can we change a little bit of what they're doing in the high school in order to allow us to have an actual community garden right on the edge of it? It involved just a few little things. For example, we worked on changing the landscaping contract with the City of Alexandria. "How does that look? Can we just tweak it a little bit?" Unfortunately, there was a little pushback with that. I don't know if you've experienced that, too. It's just the bureaucracy. Working with schools, there's a level of bureaucracy that takes some time, but you can eventually get them to change their policies. For us, it was changing the landscaping contract.

Abi-Nader: Charlottesville Schools has been extremely supportive and I would say are equal partners in terms of vision. I will note at the state level there is the Virginia Food Systems Policy Council. I don't know if you have anyone from Blacksburg that's engaged in that. They're working at the policy level. Our governor and the first lady of Virginia are extremely supportive of local food efforts, of Farm to School projects. Dorothy McAuliffe has been to our school gardens. She has visited them and has been extremely supportive. So that's been a boost, in terms of Virginia in particular.

Lyne: I actually just saw Dorothy McAuliffe speak at the Art Works for Virginia conference. She was also talking about culture in schools and how we need to keep art in our schools.

Abi-Nader: Art and food go together.

Lyne: What connections do you see between this community food systems process and civic action? Can you describe some examples when community gardening has inspired people to be more active citizens and how they became involved in other things as a result?

Abi-Nader: That is such a great point. Several years ago, I worked with the American Community Gardening Association, which is a network of community gardens all around the country. Community gardens have, for a long time, been this space where people come together and can have activities. New York City has many gardens and provides one great example of that. On a very small scale, in our community, we work with the youth to build citizenry through the garden. For example, the Buford Middle School is where our foundational garden is. We have a hoop house there. We grow

transplants. The students are starting that process now; they ordered their seeds last month.

So, they're getting the trays ready. When they're ready, they'll grow over 5,000 vegetable and herb transplants to distribute to more than a dozen nonprofit organizations in the community. They do this as part of their community service hours. They learn that, not only are we doing this, but the homeless day shelter also has a community garden and the International Rescue Committee also has community gardens for the refugees it serves. The students get to connect with gardens and provide transplants of various vegetables. They do their research and they create a little guide that explains what each plant is, what the different varieties are and then they get to distribute them. That's just one small way of helping students participate in civic sharing.

Raonka: I always think that as academics and also as activists, we at times fail to listen to the grassroots, the voices from the grassroots. We go with our conditioned mindsets and dominant ideas. It's a very big struggle for individuals to get out of it. A lot of times, people fail to do so. I was wondering, how do you use active listening in your work?

Abi-Nader: That's a great question. In the gardens, again I will speak to Buford [Middle School], we have what's called Team Talk, where we take opportunities to practice and encourage listening in a couple ways. One, we do seek to cultivate that practice of active listening. Emily Axelbaum, who is our amazing garden educator and youth engagement director at Buford, has a practice of sitting with the youths and asking them what their seed, their flower, and their surprise of the week was, so they get to talk about something they learned, something that was exciting, and something that was challenging. They do that every week, across the year. They reflect back on the week. Just having that is a small practice in establishing a culture of listening right. It starts with that.

In the summer, we have a garden group, where the crew comes in and they work in the garden. Every once in a while, we'll break off early and we'll have lunch and we'll say, "Let's brainstorm together. What do you value about this organization?" We'll create opportunities to hear students' input. It happens when you're there in the garden, when you're working on something. Rather than telling a student to do X, Y, and Z, we say, "What would you like to do

today? These are the things that need to be done” and allow them to choose and then conversation happens. I think in a school setting, activism happens in a lot of different ways. It happens through asking questions, through allowing the class to be directed by discovery, through the excitement of the young people there. I would say that’s relatively easy. At a policy level, at a network level, it becomes more challenging, right, as you’re looking at developing issues. But you use the same principles. You practice it at a small scale, over and over again, you build a culture for it.

MacAuley: Going back to the Whole Measures for Community Food Systems process, I first learned about the Whole Measures years ago. The West Virginia hub was doing a series of public meetings throughout the state and working to get all the foodie, food activist and food professional people together with farmers and regular citizens. Of course, the people who wound up there were very often nonprofit folks. We were working through the Whole Measures for Community Food Systems and it was a really valuable process. It got me thinking. Once I returned to graduate school, I remembered the Whole Measures. I have actually been learning about food security in this other completely different light, which is the U.N. defining food security as basically household food security and asking, “At a household level, do you have enough to eat?”

The funny thing is, I went and I adapted the Whole Measures once I started looking at food security on an international level. A fellow graduate student and I said, “How can we define food security differently?” Of course, remembering the Whole Measures, I said, “There’s one really amazing process that one can do to get a community to find their own version of food security. What is food security? What is it? What is the food system supposed to look like?” I applied the Whole Measures to an area of conflict in South Sudan. We just did a [an academic conference research] poster piloting the approach. We took the metrics and adapted them, just through conversation and learning about South Sudan. We adapted the measures to fit the situation there. The results were mixed. We found many of the measures were very specific to North America.

I’m wondering if you’ve ever given any thought to taking something like this process to an international level? Have you heard of anybody else who has wanted to use the Whole Measures internationally and how that went? I’m wondering if you have heard of anything like that.

Abi-Nader: I don't know that I have. I know that Whole Communities, the organization that first founded the original Whole Measures, wasn't focused on community food systems, but more on asking citizens what they saw as their whole community. That original work was broad and stretches internationally, probably. I think people are having conversations everywhere, including internationally. I don't know that you need this particular format to hold a community together. You mentioned that communities of India are coming together and they're defining what they need for their communities. I don't have any specific examples, but I imagine that the practice of story-sharing and using your values as a way to defining the future that you want, is probably pretty common in a lot of places, yet in different forms. We need to discover what those different forms are.

MacAuley: That really would be helpful. I just wanted to share, too, that I had the experience of talking to the National Agricultural Statistics Service folks about this whole process. They were pretty positive about using something like a participatory planning process, like the Whole Measures, to help communities internationally in the future define their food security or food systems.

I think it's a really good thought exercise to take something like the Whole Measures and say, "This is the definition that the U.N. uses to define food security. How do we get past that definition because it's very limiting?" We eventually came to the conclusion that the Whole Measures can really help to crystallize the point that other interventions are needed, including more participatory planning processes with communities, rather than just food aid. If you take a participatory process like this, it can really highlight that there are different actions that should be taken.

Abi-Nader: I think we had talked a little bit about defining trends. That's where it moves from. There's food security and how you define either having food or not having access to it. There is the food justice lens, which is about making decisions about your food and having a voice and a say in that industry. And there's food sovereignty, where there's actual ownership of those food systems. I think there's a continuum of going deeper and deeper into creating a whole system and that is what you're describing.

Lyne: Building on this holistic context-based approach, I believe you have a certificate in permaculture, is that correct? Can you talk to us a little bit

about how the principles you learned in permaculture have informed what you're doing now?

Abi-Nader: Yes, absolutely. I was introduced to permaculture in the early 1990s, to the teacher training course and the design course, and I then began using it in my work. The basics of permaculture are care for people, care for earth and investment of surplus resources. Such practitioners examine the core components, of who and how their systems are working and seek to mimic natural systems. You look to nature and you see a system that's working and you apply those practices to what you do. I feel like my takeaway, from years of working with permaculture, has shaped how I want to design, my organization and the organizational culture within which I live. How do we care for each other? How do we invest in each other as people? How do we invest resources and renew the system? What I can consistently do is take some of this from a culture of principles.

One of the main things you do in permaculture is a “needs-yield” analysis and so you look at your system and you see what one part of the system is yielding and what another part is needing. For example, if you have chickens and they need food to eat and there's a fruit tree and it has fruit dropping on the ground, you put your chickens near the tree. It's often those kinds of simple practices that make a difference. I've been practicing for a long time, trying to take that principle and apply it to an organization and how you work on something is really core to how I try to think about things.

Lyne: I really appreciate that. I have some experience working in nonprofits and that's the sector that I want to continue in, once I graduate. I think that's a really inspiring approach, to think about organizations, as sort of like a living being or a living organism, instead of just looking at them as structures.

MacAuley: Continuing on the permaculture question, I've heard a lot of people talk about the food system, writ large, as a giant permaculture system. I'm wondering if your own work with permaculture principles has led you to specific steps that should be undertaken, i.e., “we should do this,” in the food system overall.

Abi-Nader: Well, I'm sure there are dozens and dozens and hundreds of correlations. Let's see. There's the zone principle, right? In permaculture, you have zones, where the core of work is, so central to the home. The

home is the zone zero or the self and outside of that, there's like concentric circles or whatever shapes of the zone. You would have the things that you visit most often, close to your home. Your kitchen garden, perhaps, might be close to the kitchen so you can pop out and get your herbs. Your cattle or your animals, that are part of your system, might be further away as you don't need to tend to them as much. I think that, in general, kind of speaks of local food. In terms of the resources that you need every day, which is food to support you, to get that as local as possible. That's a bit of a stretch but I think you can definitely draw on, and develop, that analysis.

MacAuley: I kind of love that as a thought experiment, because of the principles of permaculture and the way I came to learning about agriculture as well. I've talked to a lot of different food system workers who are similarly curious.

Abi-Nader: So, is permaculture practice part of the program here? Is it taught in the school?

MacAuley: Well, certain principles are taught in the school. We've just started a class on small-scale horticulture, and I know that the instructor is aware of those principles. I don't know if they teach it, per se, in terms of a certification course. I'm wondering, and maybe this is a question for Heather, is permaculture something that you talk about in the urban planning department?

Lyne: I haven't experienced anyone talking about it, but I think that it's really closely related in the way that we look at planning and we look at communities. It's just different words that are being used for different subjects, specifically within those communities that are being analyzed. It's a good analogy for everything that we're doing. My interest just came from my family background and I don't think my parents knew they were doing permaculture, per se, growing up. But I feel that's the environment in which I grew up, in a lot of ways, and it's something in which I am interested and want to educate myself about. But I haven't had it come up specifically in my classes. I'm sure there are classes where it is really central to what's being taught.

Abi-Nader: One of our elementary school garden coordinators, Matt Darring, did a permaculture unit with the students. It was amazing. I think

it was with second graders. They learned permaculture. They learned that it means permanent agriculture. They did some research about it and then they designed their garden. This was over a whole semester. They designed their garden based on permaculture practices. They chose to do a keyhole garden and they did a spiral garden and they had some agroforestry pieces. At the end, they created a brochure that described what whole culture was and they gave everybody a tour of their gardens. It was so wonderful, seeing these young kids doing that. There are actually some cute photos of it on our website that show they did many different things. So even at that young age, you can engage around those core environmental practices and principles.

MacAuley: That's so great Jeanette. Thank you very much for coming! We really appreciate all of the expertise and wisdom you've shared about your work.

Afterword

The Art of the Interview

CATHY GRIMES

An interview is a conversation built on an agreement: one party will ask questions and the other will answer them. At the most basic level, the interviewer elicits information via the queries posed. But interviews can be so much more: They offer opportunities for conversational journeys, and when both parties are actively engaged, they can soar, offering stories and insights that both participants and their audiences perceive as enjoyable and enriching.

We encounter interviews in a wide range of activities, from those used to conduct research to those that determine whether one is hired for a job, to those that provide professionals with important information about patients or clients. While an interview is structured on the basis of questions, it is not an artificial or predetermined conversation. There is no script. There is no fictitious dialogue such as one might find in a novel. As journalism professor Ken Metzler has noted, an interview is a “multidimensional human conversation” unfolding on multiple levels (1997, 9). There is always room for discovery and surprise, depending on what questions are asked and how, and whether, they are addressed. The best interviewers ask questions one at a time and allow interviewees an opportunity to think and to answer fully. They let the questions do the work.

Interviewers use a range of question styles to accomplish their aims. Queries may be closed-ended, the kind that elicit a specific answer, sometimes a single word: yes or no. Readers of this volume however, have encountered mostly open-ended questions, what journalists call the “how, why and what” questions. That style of questioning is meant to elicit answers that fill in the gaps, provide explanations and offer insights. They often lead to anecdotes and stories. They also can lead the parties involved and the listener (or reader) into new territory, offering a fresh perspective or unexpected insight that takes the conversation in a new or deeper direction. Some of these sorts of queries are what Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jacqui Banaszynski has

called “storytelling” questions. Banaszynski has described this genre in this way: “To get the person you’re interviewing to tell you a story, you have to ask questions that prompt them to do so. A storyteller question is a question that helps put people back into the movie of their own life, it puts them into a scene for a moment” (Klinger, 2015).

“Non-questions,” such as “tell me about that” or “can you tell me how you do that,” may also elicit deeper, fuller answers. In addition, well placed questions and follow-on comments can help keep a conversation on track. As writer, journalism coach and Poynter Institute associate faculty member Chip Scanlan has said, the interviewer steers while the guest paddles (Scanlan, 2004). Someone studying the art of the interview could learn a great deal by closely examining the questions the CCC interviewers posed, and the ways in which they guided the conversations in which they were engaged.

Interviews that become engaging conversations demand a great deal of preparation on the part of interviewers. Community Change Collaborative graduate students who conducted the interviews that appear in this volume carefully researched their guest’s work and subject matter of interest, reviewing articles, books, videos and even films in advance. They developed clear questions based on their study, and shared those with their guests in advance, ensuring there would be no “gotcha” surprises, a sure way otherwise to damage the trust with which the parties enter a conversation. CCC students brought their sense of wonder, active interest and curiosity about their guests’ work and passions to the interviews they conducted. They listened carefully. And they realized that sometimes the best questions arise from chance or unexpected remarks or a story shared for another purpose. Following such leads often yields the best responses, as Metzler noted in his book on the art of the interview (1997). The evidence offered here suggests that the Community Change Collaborative interviewers were routinely able to draw out their guests and to encourage stories and insights that yielded far more than just perfunctory replies.

At their best, interviews are exchanges of ideas, providing the listener, or the reader, opportunities to learn about the interviewee through the questions posed, and to reflect actively on the responses and stories shared. The interviews that comprise this book offer just such conversations.

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Interviewee Biographies

Jeanette Abi-Nader is the Executive Director of the City School Yard Garden project in Charlottesville, Virginia. She has worked with the National Food Justice nonprofit and the internationally recognized Community Food Security Coalition. Abi-Nader co-founded the National Farmers School network and was instrumental in the passage of the nation's Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act.

Amy Brooks was the Program Director and Dramaturge for Roadside Theater at the time of this interview, the theater wing of the Appalachian Grassroots Arts and Media Center Appalshop. A fifth-generation West Virginian who returned to Appalachia just before the 2016 election, Brooks investigates the confluence of “dramatic narrative” where the question is, “What’s the story which we choose to tell on stage?” and “public narrative” where we ask “What’s the story that we are called upon to tell about ourselves, our community, and our future,” in intercultural rural urban performance. Brooks holds a B.F.A. in acting from West Virginia University and an M.F.A. in dramaturgy from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Rick Cavey is from and now lives in Grayson County on the Blue Ridge plateau. He is a retired U.S. Navy officer and diver, who now owns and operates an organic vegetable farm with his wife, Jen. Rick has enjoyed a career leading agricultural initiatives, exploring the Blue Ridge with children, negotiating peaceful partnerships with foreign nations, playing conductor to cross-sectoral underwater archaeology and executing military missions.

Frank Dukes, Ph.D., is a mediator and facilitator who directed the Institute for Environmental Negotiation at the University of Virginia (UVA) from 2000 to 2015. He is a distinguished fellow at the Institute for Engagement and Negotiation and a professor in the University's School of Architecture. He also founded the University & Community Action for Racial Equity (UCARE), which addresses UVA's legacy of slavery, segregation and its impact on the wider community. He was awarded the 2016 John C. Casteen III Diversity-Equity-Inclusion Award for the University of Virginia, and the 2012 Sharon M. Pickett Award for Environmental Conflict Resolution, presented by the Association for Conflict Resolution. He has convened and facilitated

numerous collaborative change processes and is a board member of the nonprofit organization, Kitchen Table Democracy.

Anthony Flaccavento is an organic farmer, small business owner and author based in Abingdon, Virginia, in the heart of Appalachia. He's been working on community, environmental and economic development in the region and around the nation for the past 30 years. A community development practitioner, he founded Appalachian Sustainable Development or A.S.D., which became a regional and national leader in sustainable economic development, launching innovative enterprises in food aggregation and distribution, food access for lower-income people, sustainable forestry and wood products, and more. The University Press of Kentucky published Flaccavento's book, *Building a Healthy Economy From The Bottom Up*, in 2016.

Penny J. Franklin is a local elected official, local and national union leader and civil rights activist from Christiansburg, Virginia. She was the first African American to be elected to public office in Montgomery County, Virginia and served on and was chair of the Montgomery County Board of Education. She is also a member of the Virginia School Board Association Board of Directors, President of Local 82160 of the IUE-CWA, a former board chair and now the area chair of the Montgomery County-Radford City-Floyd County branch of the NAACP, and a member of that organization's National Executive Council as well. She is co-founder of the community group and African-American civil society organization in Montgomery County, the New Mountain Climbers (NMC). NMC was the first giving circle in southwest Virginia and also the first African-American philanthropy in that region.

Amy Goldstein is an award-winning *Washington Post* reporter who spent years getting to know Janesville, Wisconsin, where the nation's oldest operating General Motors plant shut down in 2008, in the midst of the Great Recession. She wove the stories of the small city and its people together in *Janesville: An American Story*. Goldstein was one of a team of *Washington Post* reporters awarded the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting. She was also a 2009 Pulitzer Prize finalist for National Reporting and has been a Neiman fellow at Harvard University and a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

Ethan Kent is the Senior Vice President of Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit in New York City that serves as a central hub of the global

placemaking movement, connecting people to ideas, expertise and partners who share a passion for creating vital community places.

Tracy Kunkler is principal at Social Profit Strategies, a social enterprise and consulting firm that works with forward-thinking leaders who are engaged in their communities and who value collaborative leadership. Kunkler co-founded the dynamic Governance Institute, which has evolved into Circle Forward, a system of consent-based governance. She has worked with people and organizations that want to create fundamental changes in complex social systems, such as the local food systems work with which she assisted the Appalachian Foodshed Project.

Pam McMichael was serving as the Executive Director of the Highlander Research and Education Center at the time of the interview. She held the post for 12 years and formally retired in 2017. In her long career working for progressive social change, McMichael also co-founded the social justice organizations Southerners on New Ground and Showing Up for Racial Justice.

Brad Stephens served as the director of the CoLab and Lead Planner of CityWorks (X)po in Roanoke, Virginia at the time of the interview. He has spent the past several years helping foster the social change and entrepreneurship community in Roanoke and building innovative community solutions to a range of challenges, a passion in which he continues to be engaged.

Carolyn Zelikow is Associate Director of National Programs at the Aspen Institute and Program Director and Founder of the Hometown Summit, a forum to advance resilience in America's small cities.

Interviewer Biographies

Anna Erwin is an interdisciplinary social scientist and environmental scholar. She uses a collaborative research approach and an environmental justice perspective to analyze how people perceive and adapt to social-ecological change and investigate how social inequality shapes how people adapt in natural resource organizations. She has published in the *Journal of Rural Studies*, *Land Use Policy*, and *Administrative Theory and Praxis*. While studying at Virginia Tech, she was an active member of the Community Change Collaborative (CCC) where she invited speakers to campus, conducted podcast interviews with guests, and organized logistics for their visits. She is currently the Emerging Scholar Board Representative for the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society. Erwin obtained her Ph.D. from the Virginia Tech School of Public and International Affairs in 2017 and is currently a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Purdue University Department of Forestry and Natural Resources.

Vanessa Guerra is an Adjunct Faculty member with the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech. Her research focuses on urban interventions for social inclusion, community development, and sustainable development. She has consultancy experience at the Inter-American Development Bank and The World Bank, in Washington, D.C., and she is a Board member of the Regional Studies Association (RSA). Guerra earned a Ph.D. in Environmental Design and Planning at Virginia Tech; a Master's degree in Urban Planning at the University of Melbourne in Australia, and a bachelor's degree in Architecture at USFQ University in Quito, Ecuador. She has experience in urban informality, spatial justice, sustainable infrastructure, resilient cities, co-production in urban areas, design thinking, and cognitive urbanism. She has presented her work in conferences across the United States, the United Kingdom, and South America, including a TEDx event in Quito-Ecuador, Cityworks (Xpo) in Roanoke, VA, and Oxford Talks at the Transport Studies Unit at Oxford University.

Eric Hodges is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Longwood University, where he teaches courses in American Government, Political Philosophy, and Homeland Security. He completed his Ph.D. at Virginia

Tech's School of Public and International Affairs, where he had the privilege to work with Max Stephenson, Jr. Hodges researches the relationship between military service and civic service, with the aim of improving the reintegration process for veterans. Hodges has presented and published on these topics at various conferences and in several publications. In 2015, he was part of a team awarded a \$150,000 grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities to study how we can help current veterans by looking at our history. Hodges is currently working on a project that explores the motivations and modalities of civic participation of veterans in the Tampa Bay area.

Elizabeth Jamison is an Assistant Professor of Management Practice in the Virginia Tech Pamplin College of Business. Jamison's research is concerned with issues at the intersection of power, corporate social responsibility, and policy that affect achieving more socially just outcomes for marginalized and other underrepresented populations. Her research and teaching examine and critique the social, economic, and political contexts that structure how socially embedded organizations enable and/or impede possibilities for a more just and equitable global society.

Mario Khreiche is a Visiting Assistant Professor in Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University. He received a Ph.D. in Political and Cultural Thought from the Alliance of Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought at Virginia Tech. He graduated with an M.A. in Political Theory from Goethe University Frankfurt and Technical University of Darmstadt and holds a B.A. in Political Science from the University of North Texas. His research and teaching interests include the future of work, online platforms, cybernetics, and video games. Currently, his work focuses on the ways automation technologies change the nature, environments, and experiences of work. His writing is featured in *Fast Capitalism*, *Eludamos*, and the *Journal of Environmental Media*. Before joining NYU, Khreiche held appointments as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Mellon Sawyer Seminar Series on Information Ecosystems at the University of Pittsburgh and as Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of History at Virginia Tech.

Lyusyena Kirakosyan currently serves as a Senior Project Associate at the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance and a governance and development consultant for non-governmental organizations. She was a member of the Community Voices organizing team from 2010 to 2014. Her

current research interests focus on critical disability studies and social inclusion particularly in the context of the Paralympic Games and disability sport. She has been a research member of the Brazilian Paralympic Academy since January 2016. The group focuses on inquiry into paralympic sports in Brazil. She obtained her Ph.D. in Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought (ASPECT) from Virginia Tech in 2013.

Rebecca Ligrani is a food systems professional who specializes in values-based community development. She believes in the power of networks and their ability to affect change through collective impact. She has been fortunate enough to work with projects including the Appalachian Foodshed Project, the North American Food Systems Network, and the Hudson Valley Food System Coalition. Ligrani currently works as a Community Horticulture Educator focusing on food gardening and building food security at local and state levels. Ligrani's passion for food systems also manifests into practical pedagogy, as she teaches an Introduction to Food Systems course at the Culinary Institute of America. Ligrani received her B.S. in Conservation Biology from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and her M.S. in Agricultural and Extension Education from Virginia Tech, where she employed storytelling methodology to explore the social change potential of community food work.

Heather Lyne is an experienced community development professional and the current Executive Director of the Hopewell Downtown Partnership, a 501c3 nonprofit accredited by Main Street America with the mission of revitalizing downtown Hopewell. For the past eight years, she has initiated, coordinated and funded community development projects across the state of Virginia, in Colorado, and abroad through her work for Embrace Richmond, Virginia Tech, the City of Roanoke's Arts and Cultural Office, SBG Productions, Inc., and the Peace Corps. She is passionate about the arts as a catalyst for community strengthening and community change. She is Certified in both Group Dialogue Facilitation and Grassroots Organizing through VT Intercom, Virginia Organizing and VT Action, respectively. Heather earned a B.A. in Anthropology from her alma mater, the University of Georgia but returned to her roots in Virginia to earn a Master's degree in Public and International Affairs and Nonprofit Management from Virginia Tech.

Sarah Lyon-Hill is a faculty member in the Virginia Tech Office of Economic

Development. She specializes in cultivating viable solutions for community and economic challenges by integrating community input, university resources and data-driven analysis. She works across disciplines to engage stakeholders, collecting and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data to provide multiple perspectives and garner the greatest impact. Beyond her work in Virginia, Lyon-Hill also served in Northwest Africa as a Peace Corps worker, leading many community groups and facilitating vision and strategy meetings. Lyon-Hill has her Ph.D. in Planning, Governance, and Globalization, where she examined the changing national dynamics and roles of arts-based community organizations in the community and economic development. She holds a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Virginia Tech, as well as bachelor's degrees in French and International Relations from Beloit College.

Lorien MacAuley is a farmer, scholar, and Faculty Specialist in Food Systems Evaluation for the University of Maryland Extension. While she is not in the field, or at a farmers market stand, her scholarship attempts to solve the wicked problems of local and regional food systems. She is forever querying how our food systems can be socially just, equitable, biophysically sustainable, and viable for communities. Her questioning has led her to focus on issues of farm labor, beginning farmer viability, and equitable access to locally/regionally grown food. In her work, MacAuley also asks methodological questions, related to how research and scholarship may embrace difference, celebrate and lift marginalized voices, and deconstruct oppressive theoretical frameworks.

Garland Mason is the program coordinator for AgrAbility Virginia, a federally-funded program designed to help farmers experiencing illness, injury, or disability continue to farm through innovative and adaptive technologies. Mason also serves as an associate for the Center for Food Systems and Community Education. Her academic interests center on the intersection of power, knowledge, race, and nonformal education. She is particularly interested in epistemological politics surrounding land grant universities and their efforts in agricultural and community development. Her previous research explored participatory methodologies and the micro-politics of stakeholder participation. Mason previously worked in the areas of food equity and beginning farmer education in Vermont and served for two years with the Peace Corps in Nepal, working on projects related to

food security and community development. Mason holds a B.S. in Animal Science from Cornell University, and an M.S. in Agricultural, Leadership and Community Education from Virginia Tech.

Neda Moayerian is currently serving as a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG). She has been a member of the CCC at Virginia Tech since 2015. Her research interests include international development and nongovernmental organizations, art-based community development and sustainable tourism, peacebuilding and refugees/immigrants. Moayerian holds a Ph.D. in Planning, Governance and Globalization from Virginia Tech. She obtained a Master of Science in Urban Management degree from the University of Tehran (2014) and a Bachelor of Science in Urban Planning degree (2011) from the Art University of Tehran, Iran.

Andy Morikawa is IPG Senior Fellow at the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance, where he hosts the institute's Community Change Collaborative podcast, *Trustees Without Borders* (TWB). TWB is a research initiative that engages leaders of innovative social change in dialogue with graduate students, faculty, and community members. Previously, Morikawa emceed IPG's Community Voices podcast and a weekly university FM radio broadcast, *Talk At The Table*. Morikawa serves as a trustee on the boards of directors for Via International, SustainFloyd Foundation, and the Community Group of Montgomery County. Morikawa has worked for four decades with nonprofit organizations. He has served nonprofit boards as a trustee, as their organizational CEO, and as a consultant. He is a founding and steering group member for the Dialogue on Race, in its eighth year enacting change to combat racism in Montgomery County, Virginia.

Lara Nagle serves as the Community-Based Learning Projects Manager at the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VT-IPG), following two years working as a graduate student at VT-IPG focused on community development research, praxis, and program evaluation. She holds a B.A. in Environmental Studies from Oberlin College, an M.S. in Landscape Architecture from Penn State University, and a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning and a Certificate in Public and NonProfit Financial Management from Virginia Tech. Her academic and professional experience includes a variety of roles in environmental and community education, research, and project management.

Oladayo Omosa is a U.S.-based emerging evaluator originally from Nigeria with over four years of practice and research focused on culturally responsive evaluation and the Made in Africa Evaluation concept. He recently earned his doctorate in Community Education and Development at Virginia Tech, where his dissertation (Towards Defining Made in Africa Evaluation) applied the Delphi technique to refine the definition of made in Africa Evaluation. He recently worked as a part-time faculty member at Virginia Tech. Previously, he earned a Master of Science degree in Agribusiness Management at Tennessee State University and a Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Omosa is a member of both the Nigerian Association of Evaluators and the American Evaluation Association, where he has presented his many works and has served as a peer reviewer for conference proposals.

Pallavi Raonka has a Ph.D. in Sociology from Virginia Tech. Her research focuses on the ongoing conflict between the Adivasi and the Indian State over land and natural resources. Her areas of interest include the political economy of globalization and development.

Mary K. Ryan is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and the Public Policy Program Director at Washington & Jefferson College. She received her Ph.D. in ASPECT (the Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought) at Virginia Tech. Ryan has published numerous journal articles and book chapters on race, democracy, social movements, and popular culture.

Vera Smirnova is a human geographer with research interests at the intersection of critical urban theory and traditions of Russian political and geographic thought. Her current work examines the relations between land and power in Russia, in particular how rights to land ownership are enacted, negotiated, and performed through formal and informal practices. Smirnova is originally from an industrial city in the Russian North. Since completing her Ph.D. in Planning, Governance, and Globalization at Virginia Tech, she was a Postdoctoral research fellow at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow. Throughout her studies, Smirnova was a recipient of a Fulbright graduate student scholarship, Erasmus Plus mobility fellowship, and IJURR dissertation award, among others. Currently, she holds the position of Visiting Assistant Professor at Kansas State

University, Department of Geography and Geospatial Sciences and lives in Manhattan, Kansas.

D'Elia Wernecke serves as the Assistant Director of Governmental Affairs for the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), where she advocates in support of member universities' federal research policy priorities. Before joining APLU, Wernecke served as Assistant Director of Government Relations for Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. In that role, she represented the university before federal government officials and agencies, closely monitored legislation and agency actions, facilitated interactions with university administrators and faculty in support of university initiatives, and cultivated relationships with elected and appointed officials to keep them informed on issues important to the university and Virginia higher education. Prior to her full-time role with Virginia Tech's Government Relations team, Wernecke also served as that office's General Assembly Fellow, working with the Director of State Relations in Richmond, Virginia throughout her Master's degree program. Wernecke holds a Master of Public and International Affairs degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree in both English and Political Science from Virginia Tech.

Editors' Biographies



Max O. Stephenson Jr.

Max O. Stephenson, Jr. serves as a Professor of Public and International Affairs and the Director of the Institute for Policy and Governance at Virginia Tech (VTIPG). He is the author or editor of several books and more than 70 refereed articles and book chapters. Stephenson is also the author of more than 375 commentaries concerning American and international politics and democracy. Those can be accessed at the following URLs:

https://ipg.vt.edu/tags.resource.html/ipg_vt_edu:Soundings

https://ipg.vt.edu/tags.resource.html/ipg_vt_edu:Tidings.

A share of this total has also been published as a book, *Fragile Foundations and Enduring Challenges: Essays on Democratic Politics and Governance* (Virginia Tech Publishing, 2020). He has taught graduate and undergraduate courses related to community change and development both domestically and internationally for more than three decades.

More information concerning Professor Stephenson may be found here: <https://ipg.vt.edu/OurPeople/Stephenson.html>

More information concerning the Community Change Collaborative, whose activities feature in this volume, may be found here: <https://ccc.ipg.vt.edu/>.



Cathy Grimes

Cathy Grimes is the communications director for the Virginia Tech Graduate School. Prior to joining the university, she spent 20 years as a reporter, editor, columnist, social media manager and project coordinator at several news organizations. She studied education policy, social media, ethics and governance as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, and was an award-winning journalist for Olympic View Publishing, the Seattle Times Company and Tribune Corp. She has served as a coach and mentor in newsrooms, has taught writing classes at

the undergraduate and graduate level and has presented seminars on journalism at Harvard, Washington State and Hampton universities, the College of William and Mary and Whitman College. As a long-time member of the Education Writers Association, she has served on that organization's national board of directors and several advisory committees. She holds a bachelor's degree in humanities from the University of Washington and a master's degree in communication from Virginia Tech.

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