
The Cathedral Within

Transforming Your Life
by Giving Something Back

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CHAPTER FIVE

A Pioneer of

Community Wealth

I

Walla Walla, Washington, is a small city of less than thirty thousand at the foot of the Blue Mountains in the southeast corner of the state. Its entire population could be comfortably seated on one side of an NFL football stadium. It lies so close to the Oregon border that on a map, the second "Walla" almost spills across the state line. You can tell from the names of the surrounding geography that there was a time when life in this territory was not for the timid: Rattlesnake Flat, Ice Harbor Dam, Diamond Peak, Huntville, Echo. Known today for little more than the Walla Walla Sweet Onion Harvest, it was once the largest city in what was called the Washington Territory.

Built by fur traders on the famous Native American Nez Percé trail, Walla Walla was officially founded in 1856, but it had seen Lewis and Clark's footsteps half a century earlier. The gold rush made it a commercial, banking, and

manufacturing center, none of which outlasted the farms that still dominate its economy today. As one of the first areas settled between the Rockies and the Cascades, Walla Walla played a historic role in the development of the Pacific Northwest.

Walla Walla not only attracted the West's earliest pioneers, it bred a few as well. Gary Mulhair was born there in 1941. He spent his boyhood exploring the river valleys and working on farms. He can remember summers irrigating cornfields, pulling the pipes through thick rows of wet and heavy cornstalks and coming out drenched into the cold September air. In the fall, his mother sent him out to find and shell black walnuts that she wanted for cakes and pies. "They're very hard, and after cracking them, scraping the meat out of those was murder," he recalls. "Your fingers would be stained for maybe a week." She expected to receive the amount she'd asked for, often an entire bushel, no matter how hard it was or how long it took. From an early age, he understood that outcomes were what counted, that deliverables are how you measure value.

He stayed through college and eventually journeyed as far as Seattle, some 270 miles west, but no further. He never had to. The region's culture of rugged individualism has been defined by a spirited entrepreneurship and innovation that has changed the course of human history. Gary Mulhair helped do the defining. Many entrepreneurs have been at home there, from Bill Gates at Microsoft to Howard Schultz at Starbucks, as well as hundreds of others

who are part of the region's flourishing high-tech economy. But when it came to social entrepreneurship, Gary Mulhair beat them all to the punch.

Since 1975, Mulhair has been creating jobs and saving lives through a unique model that is the envy of organizations across the nation. Under his leadership, Seattle's aptly named Pioneer Human Services has become the largest and most self-sustaining human service agency of its kind. He has revolutionized the way human service organizations operate through self-supporting enterprises and programs that integrate jobs, housing, training, and other support services for at-risk individuals. With revenues in excess of \$50 million a year, Mulhair has created wealth of a magnitude previously unheard of in the nonprofit world.

He did it the toughest way possible, not by begging for foundation grants or government support, but by manufacturing and selling high-quality products and services with a workforce made up entirely of ex-offenders and former substance abusers. As he explained to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*: "These are people who have broken the law, folks most people are frightened of. They've been in prison or they're recovering from alcohol or drugs. They haven't held a job. When they apply for a job they get screened out pretty quickly. . . . We're going to hire people you wouldn't," Mulhair asserts, "but in a year or so, you will—because they'll be citizens."

What Pioneer's success means is that for the first time, a nonprofit organization is not dependent solely upon the charity of others. Its leaders do not have all of their

energies diverted and usurped by the relentless demands of fund-raising—the meetings, phone calls, dinners, and events designed to meet and win the hearts of wealthy individual donors. Instead, they can focus on what attracted them to the job in the first place: developing effective programs to help the people they serve. Pioneer has proved that nonprofits can do more than just redistribute wealth, which they are typically quite good at. They can also create wealth, though it is a different kind of wealth—community wealth—that is used to directly benefit the community.

Shattering stereotypes is a fundamentally subversive activity. Initially, Mulhair's role in inventing a new model for nonprofits to grow to scale was so quiet as to be almost unnoticed outside of the Seattle area. Running a factory, building a profitable business, and delivering comprehensive social services to a severely challenged population—all at the same time—is complicated, taxing work. Mulhair couldn't find the time to both do the work and talk about it, so he kept his focus on the former. Gradually, through word of mouth, visitors, and the circulation of a few local press clips, the story of what he'd accomplished began to spread.

I called Gary Mulhair in 1996. I asked him to come to Washington to join in a discussion about redefining civic responsibility with people like Jeff Swartz of Timberland, former New Jersey senator Bill Bradley, and Michael Kennedy from Citizen's Energy. Leaders in various fields who were helping to create this new kind of community

wealth did not yet know one another, and were not sharing, collaborating, or even talking. Share Our Strength saw value in playing the simple role of convener.

"Why do you want me?" he asked with characteristic reticence. The tone of his voice was stern. I couldn't tell whether he was genuinely curious or whether the question was some kind of test, but I was conscious of choosing my words carefully.

"Because you've been doing what everyone else only talks about."

"Okay," he said, ending the conversation. It meant he would come.

I learned then that Gary doesn't usually say more than he needs to. But when he came to Washington a few months later, he said enough.

Fifty-six years old and neatly if conservatively dressed, he maintains a steady gaze through large round lenses as if searching for the real you and pretty much expecting to find it. He is cautious with his broad smile, but friendly in the way of a small-town pharmacist. You can trust that whatever he's telling you is for your own good. He's given to short declarative statements that you can take or leave.

In his plainspoken way, and without the pretense that usually accompanies a Washington presentation, Mulhair described for the group the history of Pioneer, which began in Seattle in 1962 when an attorney named Jack Dalton was released from prison after serving a sentence for embezzling from his clients. "Jack came out of prison," Mulhair explained, "and he realized he was disbarred, dis-

owned, and disenfranchised. He had nothing going for himself except the fact that he had nothing going for himself. Along with half a dozen other former prisoners who were struggling to build new lives, he started a halfway house with a budget of less than a thousand dollars that he raised by going to the very friends from whom he had embezzled. Jack had a lot of chutzpah."

Pioneer now serves more than five thousand clients each year, employing nearly seven hundred people in its programs. Its largest business is a precision light-metal fabricator that has become the sole supplier to Boeing sheet-metal liners for the cargo bays of Boeing aircraft. On a visit there, I walked with Mulhair across a factory floor the size of a football field, listening to him chat with workers whose skills once included forging checks, trafficking cocaine, and burglary. He is able to explain each stage of the production process and how each custom-made machine operates. He describes the flow of water jets, laser cutters, and electrostatic paint machines as the workers move large, flat sheets of plastic and metal among them, cutting them into as many as three hundred precision pieces, depending on the configuration of the plane. "It's like a big jigsaw puzzle."

Thanks to Pioneer, this workforce of ex-offenders has acquired new skills in a first-rate production setting that offers the patience and support few conventional businesses can afford. Operating computer-controlled machine tools to fabricate parts according to designs transmitted electronically by their customers, the employees are held

to the most exacting standards. I asked Mulhair what kind of problems they have on the factory floor with a workforce that has such a history as this one, assuming the problems would be fighting and stealing. I assume wrong. "For about half of 'em, there comes a day where they just stop showing up. Problems with authority or what have you. That's about the only difficulty we have. But we can plan for it now and build it into the cost of doing business."

Mulhair is emphatic that quality is not sacrificed. He's got convincing evidence. In 1996, Pioneer's plant became the first nonprofit in the United States to win ISO-9002 certification, a benchmark for quality in the private sector. Even more convincing, Boeing keeps expanding its contract year after year.

In fact, Gary would argue that market forces ensure higher quality. As he told *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*:

Most of our activities are customer-driven, and it gives us a different relationship with the people we're providing services for than if we were getting government money or foundation money. What you care about when you are talking to a foundation officer is getting his or her money into your organization, and that's input-driven. Our activities are output-driven. . . . I don't think nonprofits in this country have done a very good job of understanding the management side of things, understanding that their businesses should succeed or fail not on how much money they raise, but on how good a job they do. And that means understanding who

your customers are and always focusing on satisfying your customers.

Pioneer also operates a wholesale food distribution enterprise that reaches four hundred food banks in twenty states. Other businesses include a real estate division that develops and manages more than 500,000 square feet of residential and commercial properties, and the Mezza Café—a 150-seat cafeteria for the corporate headquarters of Starbucks. In 1986, Pioneer bought the St. Regis Hotel in the heart of Seattle's popular Pike Place Market district. Today, it has been transformed into an unusual hybrid, serving tourists on a budget and recovering substance abusers participating in Pioneer's rehabilitation programs.

Ten years ago, 75 percent of Pioneer's revenues came from government, mostly in the form of grants. Today, that has been reduced to 25 percent, and most of that is from government contracts for services. Fifty million dollars in revenue is a lot of money for a nonprofit, and it attracts more. The Ford Foundation just wrote a check for \$2.4 million so that Pioneer can continue to acquire other businesses and convert them into sheltered nonprofit workshops. As a result, Pioneer bought Greater Seattle Printing & Mailing in Redmond, Washington, a six-million-dollar business with lots of entry-level jobs, particularly on the mailing and fulfillment side.

There is one fundamental reason that nonprofits have only rarely started or owned businesses for the purpose of

generating revenues for growth and sustainability: They only rarely thought they could. It has been a colossal failure of imagination pervasive to the nonprofit sector. That's not to say there are not financial, managerial, and regulatory hurdles to overcome; there are in any business venture. But the limitations on nonprofits starting businesses have by and large been self-imposed.

Gary Mulhair managed to get around that. "Growing up in such a small town like Walla Walla made me feel that there were no limitations," he told me over dinner during a visit to New York. "I've never accepted that things had to be just one way or another."

II

Gary Mulhair finds himself in transition. The greatest demands on his time are no longer from customers or factory floor managers. They are from business-school professors, reporters, and human-services experts across the country who want to see what he has done and learn how it can be replicated. Foundations want him to consult with their grant recipients. Associations of nonprofits want him to keynote their conferences. He serves on boards and advisory committees ranging from the American Correctional Association to the Geese Theatre Company. It's not the role he expected to be playing.

Mulhair began his career at Pioneer as a staff consultant

running the business office and the Corrections Alcohol Drug Program. In 1979, he designed and built the Food Bank Buying Service, providing a cooperative wholesale food and distribution service to almost one hundred northwest food banks. By then, Pioneer founder Jack Dalton had left the organization, though he served on Pioneer's board until his death. In 1983, Mulhair became director of finance and operations, managing agency needs and monitoring asset utilization.

"The long-term vision had been to create a self-supporting, outcome-driven, wealth-creating, entrepreneurial nonprofit organization. It took much longer than it should have to understand that the greatest constraint was getting highly capable people to share the vision. Having it myself was not enough. . . . I never really thought that resources would be difficult to obtain if the vision was understood."

Since then, Mulhair's vision has grown more expansive. Today, he hopes to transform the traditional model of corporate giving into a new philosophy that he calls "operational philanthropy." His plea to other businesspeople, through the pages of the *Puget Sound Business Journal*: "Instead of giving us money, give us work. We'll convert that to jobs and hire the people you won't hire. You'll receive products and services you need at a competitive rate."

Mulhair describes his business this way: "Our clients are recovering alcoholics and addicts coming out of prisons and jails, moms and crack babies, folks that never went to school, folks that don't have jobs. Our job is to create

opportunity for them. We do that by recognizing all the limitations these folks bring to the table, and recognizing it takes a long time for them to change their lives." Pioneer structures its programs so that people can move through residences and enterprises over a two- or three-year period, all the while concentrating on making the business pay for itself.

The term "social entrepreneur" is in vogue today, but often goes conveniently undefined. To some, it means solving problems through the private sector rather than through government. To others, it implies a commitment to running your organization "like a business." And to some, simply being young and starting an organization qualifies as entrepreneurial.

Many define social entrepreneurs by the passion they bring to bear, but surely more than passion and youth are involved. I know lawyers, accountants, and car mechanics who are in their twenties and are passionate about what they do. But they are not entrepreneurs.

Being an entrepreneur, social or otherwise, requires something more. It must be defined as doing things in ways that have not been done before. This, in turn, often means taking risks, innovating, and experimenting, all of which are characteristic of entrepreneurs, but do not necessarily define them.

Mulhair doesn't talk much about being a social entrepreneur; he just goes about being one. "We try to find a customer to experiment on, and often it is Pioneer. We learn to provide price, quality, and service to ourselves,

and then we go out and sell it to a third party. Give me the best management and the worst model, and I'll beat the best model and the worst management every time."

Gary is that most valuable of all teachers and preachers—a practitioner. He's that rare breed that waited to have a story to tell before going out and telling it. "I've always been a bit reluctant to play the role of leader. I was content to be an operator and to share the results."

Mulhair has gone beyond defining an agenda for the nonprofit sector. He's also been identifying the ingredients of how the business community can create community wealth. In discussing companies like Boeing and others who buy Pioneer's products, Mulhair wrote in the *Puget Sound Business Journal* that "when these companies contract to buy our products, they are creating a job opportunity for someone who desperately needs it. We call it 'operational philanthropy.' Many business people aren't used to thinking about using their vast purchasing power to meet philanthropic need. While they donate money generously, they fail to realize what an impact spending some of their vendor dollars on operational philanthropy could have. We need more companies to listen to our story and let us compete for the contracts they give to their vendors every day."

Through operational philanthropy, Boeing has almost certainly had a greater impact on issues surrounding ex-offenders and substance abusers than any foundation in the Pacific Northwest, and it has done so not through its philanthropy, but purely as a result of a purchasing decision.

What's easy to lose sight of in all of the excitement

about how Pioneer generates revenues is how those revenues are spent. Mulhair understands the complexities of helping people transition from drug and alcohol dependency. His philosophy is to wrap a cocoon around them through a blend of training, counseling, safe housing, a job, and careful monitoring to assure community safety. Pioneer is unique in offering all the services needed in one organization.

"My job is to create jobs," Mulhair explains. "I want people in my business, but when I get them in here, they come with a whole basket of problems, just a whole bundle of problems. We have to focus an enormous amount of attention on solving those problems—where are they going to live, keep them off drugs and alcohol, get them to work on time, get them to get along with their supervisor, get them reading skills."

As Mulhair concluded in a talk at a Stanford Business School conference on social enterprise: "My job is to add value to people by adding value to goods and services. . . . My job is not to please shareholders. I don't have any. What I have are people who need jobs and opportunity, and what they really want to add to themselves is economic value and social value. So our job is to facilitate that in as many ways as we can."

The implications of Mulhair's work are far-reaching. For nonprofits struggling to survive, the model is as seductive as water in the desert—maybe too seductive, for there is nothing easy or guaranteed on the risky path of starting a business. For those who aspire not only to survive but to

thrive, it represents the essential missing link in their evolutionary progress. In the long term, if there is to be a long term for such organizations, there is simply no alternative. The choice they face is whether to fight for their share of the charitable pie, or to make that pie and their share grow.

If other organizations can be as successful as Pioneer, the wall between for-profit and nonprofit may soon become an anachronism. Gary Mulhair's work does not fit neatly into one category or another. Pioneer Industries is not a for-profit corporation. In fact, Mulhair admits, "Our strategies have involved ruthlessly exploiting our nonprofit status. We have learned to use all of the laws that are out there to reduce our operating costs. We are exempt from every imaginable business tax that I can find in the state of Washington: We run sheltered workshops that are exempt."

But with half a dozen businesses, seven hundred employees, and \$50 million a year, Pioneer is not really a nonprofit either, except in the most technical, legal sense of the word. Instead, it is something new, something we don't have tax laws and regulatory bodies for, at least not yet. It is a community-wealth enterprise.

What Mulhair built took twenty years. He is not finished, but he is already the reference point for all of those who follow, a pioneer of community-wealth enterprise. He succeeded where others have failed, and his success is at an order of magnitude greater than anyone else who ever succeeded in the same field. Changing the rules of our free-market economy cannot be done from one annual report

to the next. It is not the work of a single career. It is necessarily the work of a lifetime, or of several lifetimes, which Mulhair seems to have implicitly understood.

I asked Mulhair what served as his specific inspiration. "This has been almost entirely internally driven. It seems to come from imagining 'states' that I think are desirable (i.e., things I think should be that aren't) and then being motivated to achieve the things that are imagined. This process, for me, involves mentally identifying obstacles to what it is I want to achieve. The internal motivation comes from trying to imagine all the ways to overcome the obstacles without compromising anything. Essentially, I'm competing against myself, and I'm motivated by the internal competition."

Nancy Carstedt's experience with the Chicago Children's Choir was described as special, but not uncommon. Thousands of organizations are similarly situated. The same cannot be said for Pioneer. It stands out as one of a kind, much the way the cathedral of Milan does among Italy's multitude of churches. This is cathedral building at work. All of the ingredients are there:

- a vision of what can be rather than what is
- working back from that envisioned outcome, rather than measuring input
- integrating diverse materials and resources into an architecture that fits, and understanding that they are all needed, not just one
- devotion to a task that spans an entire career because

the job couldn't really be accomplished right in less than that time

— recognition that everyone has value to add, that everyone has a strength to share

These, indeed, are the ingredients of something magnificent, something that counts, something that lasts.

III

Pioneer Human Services was not the first example of community-wealth creation in the country. It is just one of the largest, and arguably the most impressive. Mulhair's work at Pioneer paralleled a virtual explosion in this type of innovation and entrepreneurship among those leading social change efforts in the United States.

As nonprofit organizations in every American community are scrambling to bridge gaps in federal social spending, they're turning to the business sector, not for donations but to create their own sources of revenue. The most innovative ideas are emerging from unlikely places. An order of Roman Catholic priests produced a feature film, *The Spitfire Grill*, that captured the Sundance Film Festival Audience Award. The \$4 million profit from its sale to Castle Rock Entertainment will help to support the social service programs of the church.

Such efforts come in several different varieties. Business

enterprise is just one type. For example, Minnesota Public Radio sold its catalog business to the Dayton Hudson Corporation for an estimated \$120 million. About three-fourths of the proceeds—\$90 million—will be added to the nonprofit's endowment.

Other organizations have pursued licensing or cause-related marketing partnerships that have proved lucrative and furthered their ability to expand operating capacity. The range of activities is breathtaking:

— The National Trust for Historic Preservation raises revenues through study tours in the United States and abroad, and through the sale of reproductions of historic furniture.

— New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey, was founded by Monsignor William Linder to provide social services and create jobs. To fund its activities—and employ city residents—it opened much-needed retail, banking, real estate, and food services. The Corporation also manages a for-profit fine-dining restaurant in a converted Gothic church. These ventures provide the resources to run a nursing home that employs 240 people, a group of seven day-care centers that employ another 240, and a home health-care program that employs 160. "We also started our own business-loan fund and a low-income-housing tax-credit pool for smaller nonprofit organizations in the state, so that they can become more competi-

tive," reports Linder. "Last year was our first year, and we did \$12 million. We expect to do \$25 million this year."

— Store of Knowledge, based in Los Angeles, is a for-profit chain of retail stores located in shopping malls across the country. Almost every new store is opened in partnership with a local public broadcasting station. In fact, the original concept for the chain came from a Los Angeles public broadcasting station, KCET. The local public television affiliate contributes its reputation, name, logo, and promotional support in exchange for a percentage of sales and an equity stake in the store. Store of Knowledge, Inc., contributes the start-up and operating capital along with all of the functions necessary to run the retail operation. The company will operate more than sixty-five retail stores and expects sales to reach \$100 million by the end of 1998. If the company goes public, its public broadcasting partners expect a solid financial return—the company has been profitable from the start. Store of Knowledge's partnerships create a competitive advantage. As Paul Gainer, vice president of general merchandise, says, "People identify us as the local station's store. That's what separates us from other toy stores."* Gary Ferrell, executive vice president for business development and chief financial officer for

**The Wall Street Journal*, "Public TV Toy Stores Target the Cathedral," December 8, 1997.

KCET, says, "Our community perceives the Store of Knowledge as another way that the station reaches out and touches the community. Although it's a purely for-profit company, they view it as another way that KCET serves its community."

—Asian Neighborhood Design was founded in 1973 by community-minded architecture students at the University of California at Berkeley who wanted to improve living conditions in San Francisco's Chinatown. The organization provides low-income communities with housing, tenant education, and job training. Its construction and cabinetmaking business, Specialty Mills Products, generates \$2 million of its \$5.2 million budget. They have manufactured woodwork and other fixtures for residences, commercial businesses, and offices throughout California.

—Housing Works, Inc., provides housing, health care, job training, job placement, and a wide array of support services to men, women, and children living with AIDS or HIV in New York. Through thrift shops and a used-book café they had projected sales in 1997 of \$5 million, and they employed forty-five people.

—The Nature Conservancy, which is the nation's twentieth-largest charitable institution and its largest conservation organization, launched a joint venture with the Vermont Land Institute to purchase twenty-seven thousand acres of timberland in

New York and Vermont that will be managed as a commercial demonstration project to show that land can be commercially logged without damaging watershed and wildlife. John Sawhill, the president of the Nature Conservancy, told *The Wall Street Journal*, "We have got to demonstrate that you can earn an economic rate of return on land while also protecting biodiversity." In a hint of what might be to come, he added, "It's not only in forestry, but also in agriculture, oil drilling, and ranching."

The potential now exists to transform the role that the civic sector plays in society, and to transform the way the nonprofit and corporate communities work together by literally creating community wealth through business enterprise, cause-related marketing partnerships, and licensing—directing profits back into the community. The challenge now is to advance this concept.

IV

I asked Gary Mulhair how he fueled his own creative process. His tenure at Pioneer had been marked by one innovation after another, the only visible pattern being adapting ideas from one sector and making them work in another. He explained: "The really important learning source for me has been a wide-ranging reading list that

includes history, biography, science fiction, natural sciences, business, periodicals, and newspapers. I'm not quite sure how it works in my mind, but the creative or learning process seems to be driven by taking in as much and as varied information as I can. It seems to percolate until insight occurs. I liken the insight to connecting the dots and seeing patterns and opportunities where others just see chaos."

His answer fits squarely with an insightful and long-established theory of creativity I learned through Joel Fleischman, one of the most compassionate and important thinkers and leaders in the effort to help nonprofit organizations grow to scale.

It is sometimes unfairly seductive to think of our newer friends as wiser than our older ones, but in the case of Joel Fleischman this is true. He has been on the law faculty of Duke University for nearly three decades, and he also directs their Center for Ethics at the Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy. The boards he serves on are as diverse as the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, the John and Mary Markle Foundation, and Harvard's Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy. He has authored numerous articles on philanthropy, urban studies, and public financing of elections, and he was wine columnist for *Vanity Fair* for eight years.

After a relatively brief introduction to Share Our Strength, Joel suggested, in a manner gentle as ever, a book by Arthur Koestler: "He has this theory of creativity which is really what your work is evidence of."

Koestler's theory goes by the clumsy name "bisociation theory," and is described in his book *The Act of Creation*. Its essence is that all acts of creation involve the mental conjunction of two previously separate ideas. Bisociation is the act of combining two ideas from different worlds to create something new. Gutenberg's invention of movable type is a good example. Having already been familiar with the idea of carving letters into small individual blocks, it took participating in a wine harvest and noticing the pressure exerted by the wine press to combine the idea of movable type and the printing press. The prescription for creativity, almost exactly as Mulhair described, is to have a wide range of interests to increase the likelihood of two disparate ideas coming together. The importance of Koestler's work is that it refutes the notion that creativity is confined to accidents of birth or genius, and argues instead that it can be nurtured, and that we know what the specific conditions are for nurturing it well.

This is something that chefs almost uniquely (not accidentally, I now realize) do every day. They combine ideas that simply haven't been combined before. Consider *New York Times* food writer Marian Burros's description of one of the most admired chefs in the United States, Michel Richard:

Michel Richard strode into his kitchen one morning last week and announced, "I want to make French toast." . . .

He stuffed them [two ordinary slices of white bread] with a slice of crème brûlée, welded them together with a paste of confectioners sugar and water, then dipped the "sandwich" in

beaten egg and sautéed it in butter. For a finishing touch he dusted it with confectioners sugar and then browned it with a blow torch.

The next morning he was at it again, this time with caramelized apples between two very thin slices of bread and no egg dip. Finally it was coming together. Mr. Richard was onto something.

Moving from one experiment to another, he soon had his chef de cuisine, Stephan Beauvillet, poaching fish in olive oil. Then he was spooning lemon olive oil over vanilla ice cream. Impossible to explain why, but it tasted superb. That's Michel Richard.

Bisociation is not uncommon to chefs. Another example, this time, one that had a positive impact on the public interest, came about this way:

Even traveling in first class, Monique Barbeau was wary of other airline passengers. She'd been bothered too often by flirtatious businessmen. She preferred to sit alone, read, and mind her own business. So when Dean Kasperzak, handsome, boyish, and well-tailored, sat down next to her, she avoided eye contact. But there was no way Dean could have known this, and accordingly he was undeterred. The irony was, this time there really was something to talk about. They were each in a business that, in a way, depended upon the other.

Barbeau is one of the best chefs in the country, and when she is not at her acclaimed restaurant, Fullers, at the Seattle Sheraton Hotel & Towers, she is acting as guest chef

or cooking at benefits for charity. With just a trace of an accent from her native Canada and more than a trace of a smile, she is quick to engage, and hold her own with, anyone.

Kasperzak was the vice president of Calphalon, a leading producer of high-quality cookware and kitchen accessories based in Perrysburg, Ohio, and founded in 1963 by his father, Ronald M. Kasperzak. Originally, the company produced a quality line of heavy-duty aluminum cookware for the food-service industry. In the late 1960s, Calphalon developed a hard-anodized heavy-duty aluminum cookware line that made the cooking surface stick-resistant. The company distributed this new cookware, called Calphalon, through the food-service market to gourmet chefs. Because Calphalon markets itself as "the professional cookware," getting chefs like Monique Barbeau to use its products is no small part of Dean's job.

Once the conversation wandered into comfortable territory, it wasn't long before Barbeau told Dean about Share Our Strength. She had participated in Taste of the Nation benefits, and she immediately saw opportunities for partnership that would benefit both SOS and Calphalon. She encouraged Dean to get together with me, and we did.

At that first meeting, Dean gave me an energetic, enthusiastic briefing on Calphalon, speaking continuously for about thirty minutes about products, employees, market share, and profitability. Then he stopped and exhaled a deep sigh. "But look, it's just pots and pans," he said.

For Dean, something was missing. For SOS, an opportunity was born.

I told him about the work of Share Our Strength, how we find ways for individuals and companies to contribute through their skills, to literally share their strength. We both recognized that it would be great to work together, but we didn't have specific ideas about what form that might take. After a few hours of discussion, we went our separate ways.

In about ten days, Dean called me from his office near Toledo. In a completely different tone of voice from "but it's just pots and pans," he said, proudly, "Our strength to share is that we make pots and pans. And we want to make one for SOS." I wasn't sure what he had in mind, but I liked the way he was thinking.

Dean proposed that Calphalon refashion its two-quart sauté pan and market it as the Taste of the Nation pan. They would license the Taste of the Nation trademark that we owned and pay us a royalty of five dollars per unit sold. Sure, I thought. The Taste of the Nation pan? Go knock yourself out. It sounded like the most ridiculous thing I'd ever heard. Why would anyone want to buy something called "the Taste of the Nation pan"?

Calphalon ended up selling about four times as many of those pans as they'd sold the year before. In that first year alone, Share Our Strength received royalties of \$180,000. The partnership worked because we spent a lot of time at Calphalon trying to understand what made pots and pans sell for them. What we learned is that a key ingredient is their relationship with their major retailers. So we constructed a three-party relationship. Calphalon licensed our

trademark, the major department stores like Bloomingdale's and Macy's positioned the product front and center of their cookware sections, and Share Our Strength was contractually obligated to bring the best chefs in every city—Monique Barbeau and her colleagues—into those department stores to do cooking demonstrations.

When it came time for us to receive that first royalty check of \$180,000, Dean Kasperzak asked if I would come to their headquarters in Toledo, Ohio, to accept the check at a ceremony in front of their employees. A ceremony was organized in the company auditorium. As Dean took the podium, he talked about how proud Calphalon was of the role they'd played in our hunger efforts, and as he handed me the check and we shook hands, he said into the microphone: "I hope this money has a big impact on your hunger relief efforts and that it will really make a difference in your work." I took the microphone to assure him it would and to add a word of thanks. As we were walking off stage, he leaned a bit closer and said, much more quietly, in a stage whisper really, "If we're giving you \$180,000, can you imagine how much *we* made?"

That was exactly the relationship Share Our Strength wanted to have with Calphalon. The benefits to them were so clear and compelling, so directly tied to their own profitability, that they had as strong a vested interest in its continuation and success as we did. It was a partnership that created new wealth. As a result, it was sustainable over time. The best evidence of this is that years later, the relationship has continued even after Calphalon was acquired

by Newell, a larger housewares company, and even after Dean Kasperzak left Calphalon.

As valuable as the ongoing royalties have been for SOS, that is probably not the most important part of the experience. As I left the Calphalon auditorium that afternoon and unexpectedly cut through the office building on the way to the parking lot, I saw something that felt every bit as good as the \$180,000 check in my breast pocket. The screen saver on many of the employees' computers was the SOS logo, and there were antihunger posters in the employee lounge and on the poster boards hung in their cubicles.

The lessons learned at Calphalon were profound. They were a small blue-collar company in Toledo, Ohio, that made great pots and pans. That was their mission. They never contemplated playing a major role in ending hunger across America, nor did they have any desire to be considered as socially responsive along the lines of a Ben & Jerry's or The Body Shop, but they learned something surprising. The type of community involvement they always thought might be nice but too costly to afford had actually turned out to be quite profitable. In every year since that first one, the initiative to expand the relationship has come from Calphalon, driven not by Share Our Strength's need for additional dollars to fight hunger but by Calphalon's chief financial strategists telling senior management that this is good for their business.

As Dean Kasperzak testified one night in New York following a black-tie awards dinner and three strong martinis: "I used to be a pot-and-pan salesman, but now, be-

cause of what we've done together, I'm a tuxedo-wearing, community-wealth-building, pot-and-pan salesman."

If Calphalon can be engaged in such a community-wealth-building partnership, so too can any company in the country. What it takes is the creativity that comes with taking ideas from one sector and making them work in another, and a commitment to structuring a partnership in ways that are truly mutually beneficial.

History is replete with powerful examples of ordinary people using skills honed for one craft or trade for an entirely different purpose, at times extraordinary in its impact.

Consider a collection of rare photographs called "The Illegal Camera." I read about it in a *New York Times* review of a traveling exhibition of such photos. They were more than half a century old and depicted what came to be known as "The Hunger Winter." That caught my interest, but only hinted at the incredible drama behind these pictures.

On May 10, 1940, German troops entered and began a long occupation of the previously neutral Netherlands. Over the next five years, the Netherlands lost more of its Jewish population than any other Western European country. At the war's end, only twenty-seven thousand Jews had survived from a pre-occupation population of 140,000. As the German military presence and subsequent roundup of Jews to concentration camps increased, German civil law was imposed, restricting photographers from shooting or publishing any unapproved subject.

An underground resistance developed. By working from secret vantage points or hiding their cameras in coats and bags, Dutch photographers were able to document, albeit in oddly tilted and blurred photos, the tragic developments in their country. One of the most tragic came during the winter of 1945, one of the coldest on record. The shortage of food resulting from the German occupation, strikes, and evacuations brought severe starvation and death, especially in large cities like Amsterdam. The underground photographers not only sought to record their images for posterity, but courted even greater danger by smuggling them to England to convince the exiled Dutch government and the Allied forces to authorize food drops to alleviate the suffering.

The black-and-white images themselves—a boy with bony legs sticking out from his nightshirt, six emaciated bodies awaiting burial, a woman struggling to raise a crust of bread to her mouth—are horrible and sad, but they are not nearly as remarkable as what we don't see, just inches from the lens: the photographers themselves, who accepted the gravest possible risks to their lives and their families to tell the world of hunger. They had no money, no weapons, no legal right to conduct their work, but they had the power to bear witness, as do we all, and they had the courage to use it.

America faces a "hunger winter" of a very different sort. The repeal of welfare and cuts in food stamps, including \$14 billion from the three million families who fall below the poverty line (making less than \$6,200 a year), will take

food away from children and send some of them into the streets. Millions will be hungry in the months ahead.

Hunger here is due to poverty, ignorance, and injustice. There is, of course, no comparing this to the unparalleled horror of the Holocaust. But there is inspiration to be taken from the handful of brave patriots who knew that for all they couldn't do there was one thing they could, and that was to see and tell a story that needed to be told. In our country, the camera is not illegal. We have not only the power but the right to see, to tell, to speak out, to insist that our fellow citizens take notice and act. We have hunger close to home. What we don't have is an excuse for silence.

Today's leaders don't want to risk a campaign contribution or a single percentage point in the polls, let alone their careers or lives, to speak out on behalf of the politically incorrect hungry. In truth, there weren't many that stuck their necks out fifty years ago about the suffering in Europe. There certainly weren't enough. But there were a few, a handful who knew that for all they couldn't do there was one thing they could, and that was to see and tell a story that needed to be told then, and maybe even more so now.

Near the end of the exhibition, there is one picture that was taken out in the open, of a small parade on the day after the Netherlands was liberated. Three young boys in short pants and tailored coats are standing on an empty cobblestone street alongside a canal. Their coats are torn and tattered. The smallest one is standing in front waving a flag, and the two behind him are banging sticks across the

top of large tin boxes. Their smiles are tentative, fragile, as if not sure this moment of freedom can last. If you look very closely at the tin boxes they have fashioned into drums, you can see the stenciled letters on the sides of the air-dropped provisions: WELFARE BISCUITS.

If there is a time to come in this country when children who were once scared and hungry can joyously beat drumsticks against the welfare packages they no longer need, it will be because Americans have recognized that there is a role for everyone in the battle to save our children and build better communities. Whether we are rich or poor, black or white, educated or unskilled, each of us has at least the strength to do one personal but profound thing: bear witness to a common vision of what decency and humanity can mean.

The Dutch photographers' pictures show what hunger looked like half a century ago, under extraordinary, unprecedented circumstances. But if you look carefully—indeed, if you look beyond them—you can see straight through to what a courageous heart could achieve then, now, and ever.

Ordinary people using skills they'd taken for granted, but putting them to a new purpose in an extraordinary way—bissociation is one name for it, cathedral building another. Either way, the results are the same.