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Is community organizing in trouble today?

I think it is and I think so for a number of reasons. I think it is first of all because money is scarce and to do organizing you need trained people and you need a salary and there's no such thing as a free lunch so you don't get good organizing without money. We found that out in trying to take neighborhood people and train them for organizing and unless your issues are so gutsy that it's a matter of life or death, whether you get that done, volunteer organizers don't work.

Has that always been the case?

Early on in the '60's, I worked as a volunteer organization in the initial organization of the SICO before we had our first congress. Joe McNealy was the only paid staff we had at that time and the only way he could do the job and deliver an organization within a reasonable period of time and we set April as a target date for congress and we wanted it before NECO had theirs, NECO had much more time and place than we did and had much more money in it. So the only thing we could do was to get the free publicity and we were really challenged to deliver our founding congress before NECO's came off so that we would be in a position to get free publicity from the print media, TV, radio, whatever. And McNealy said to those of us that were on the steering committee that he could only do it by taking volunteer people and using them in a number of slots; that was everything from clerical help to actual organizing help. And when I volunteered I thought I was going to go in the office and do some typing. You know he wanted me as an organizer and I was a little bit frightened because I'm very safe in my own bailiwick but I was going to be organizing in areas that I wasn't known other than going in and saying I was Gloria Aull and my credentials were my PTA leadership and my church position and so forth. And I was really very vulnerable because in '68 we had a big blowup in church, our pastor had a nervous breakdown and left the ministry. We had bought a storefront to do social ministry and I was really involved in that and the church figured that Augie and the pastor
were ferdoozing (sp) with the money because Aug was on the church council and was financial secretary and when he adn the pastor weren't playing around with money then I was sleeping with the pastor, I mean it was an ugly thing and I was really hurt.

You were sleeping with the pastor?

Well, that's what the story was. I mean we were a corrupt group and that hurt a great deal because Augie was the first acolyte in our church and we had been there for so long it was almost like your mother and father rejecting you. I was bleeding pretty badly for a couple years and I recognized that we needed a bigger group than what we had at church to do the kind of things that needed addressing in the neighborhood so I was right for putting together an organization like SICO because I had been through these hurtful experiences of putting together a smaller group. The church wasn't big enough to do it alone. We had a poor group of leadership that had vision and understood problems and were willing to ( ). We had 5 churches involved in that storefront, 5 protestant churches, but all of us were cut off, the rest of the congregation left this ( ) and sawed the limb off behind us.

Virginia ( ) who was one of the founding members of SICO was caught in that same thing as a member of a calvary church which was one of the 5 churches that was in the coalition. I don't think she has ever quite recovered from her wounds because she had taught Sunday school, she had trained Sunday school teachers, she had done youth work and her family had been members of that methodist church like for 50 years and that was a bit hard for her to take. So when Joe said I was going to be a volunteer organizer I was really frightened because I thought everybody in east Baltimore knew all that scandalous crap about me that the people in church had kicked around. But McNealy was the kind that he wouldn't let you alone—it's like a cat worrying a mouse and shaking it and that's what he did, I mean he literally set fires under everybody's ass on a regular basis and if you did something and thought you were off the hook and you tried to retreat for 2 days, he'd come in to debrief you for what you did the day before and then to set up a whole set of new premises
for the next approach. I guess what helped was he not only used the volunteers from the neighborhood but he was very good in ferreting out institutional people and professionals that are supposed to be doing things and advocates for neighborhoods, and challenging them to do what they were hired to do rather than functioning as a bureaucrat. Joe probably had 10 or 12 of us in the neighborhood that he recognized had organizing ability and maybe he had another 6 or 8 professional people who by nature of their job were in the area either with the city health dep't or with Social Services and I was assigned with a guy from Social Services who was a fairly new hire who was idealistic but he didn't know his asshole from first base about how to deliver services or anything about people.

I just want to backtrack. I don't understand what advantage was it that they started spreading all that stuff around to close up the storefront.

Because they didn't approve of it.

Because it was interdenominational?

Yeah, and you were getting people in that really the church didn't want.

But people who needed the help.?

Yeah. I worked primarily with young folks and I guess I did work with teenagers for 15 years or so and at this point I couldn't work with young people again because I hurt too much for them and I don't think I have an ounce of flesh left that I could let them nibble on because I was being completely wiped out by the energies that they took from working with them and the energies that was necessary to protect them from the antagonism across the street in the church building and the energy that I needed to pursue the programs that I was designing.

So did you feel that when you were going into SICO organizing that you might run into the same kind of problems?

Yes because I don't care that I was working in Canton with the church. People in this neighborhood are pretty much alike in terms of thinking and I really didn't have a great deal of hope. I may be an optimist in terms of hitting my own head against a brick wall but I'm a realist to the extent that I understand how heads
work and I know usually where this neighborhood is going is going to come down. I was disappointed in the road fight and I said to Augie 'God this is the first time I've been on the negative side of an argument and I've had support' because this neighborhood is terribly negative. They'd much rather oppose something than be for something but nobody would oppose the road—that was too big to fight, couldn't fight city hall—and I was a nut. When Barbara and I fought the road we were going to bring niggers in to east Baltimore. If those houses went, they were going to put public housing down there. That was the argument the politicians offered, sureptitiously, never in public, of course. But that was the underside of that thing. The whole road thing was a-brewing, fermenting when I came out of that bad experience in '68 because the first meeting of a city-wide group about the expressway was at the Catholic Information Center in the summer of '68. We had been through this thing with the pastor in June and that meeting I think was in July and I didn't go to that meeting at the Catholic Information Ctr. because I was still too busy licking wounds. We had a summer camp program that I had helped put together with the pastor and I had volunteered to cook and I was determined that it was going to go and I saw that through. I went through a Spanish Inquisition in the fall because they had congregational meetings every Sunday after church to ask me where money went and what happened and blah blah. I have to say one of the young men that I had worked with as a teenager was a member of the church council and was the church treasurer and he sat there with the books and answered questions and I couldn't in good conscience let Norman sit there and take that without being there with him because I had gotten involved again in youth activities when he had taken a seat on the church council because he was chairman of the youth committee and asked me to help him put together programs.

Are you still active in the church?

No.

That experience pretty much put you over the top.

Yeah. We had had splits and divisions over the years and I'd always gone back there to try and mend things because I thought that the existence of the church
was important to the community and this was like the last straw. We go downtown to Zion but we haven't joined Zion because both of us are like once burnt, twice leary. Zion is nice because we go in and worship and not be involved. That bothers me because of the background that I have, that I'm doggin' it and not fully participating. The other thing that was hard for me to deal with and is still difficult is that as a Christian I should be able to forgive those people and I haven't been able to and that bothers me because then I'm condemned by my own belief. They have a young pastor down there now, they've turned the back part of the building over to the Lutheran cluster and the Y was running programs in there so all of these things were things that we saw that the rest of the congregation didn't see but I said to someone recently I don't like being right early. It hurts too much. I've had some bitter experiences. When I said to the mayor he'd a been a wonderful mayor if he'd a taken my advice 15 years ago and put the money in mass transit because everybody would say Baltimroe was really ahead of time. We were telling him that he was putting money in a dinosaur but he didn't see that because the only money available in those days was federal money for roads. There were no programs for the cities. I have for the last 3 years kind of (    ) with the exception of what I did on teh history project and that was interesting because what we did with Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project, Baltimore Voices, you could not have done in 1968. People would not have set still for that. So that's a plus for community workers, that we created the climate that allowed us teh luxury of doing that. There were too many needs in '68 that everyone wanted addressed. So when I went into that volunteer situation I went in with a push-pull thing, a commitment because I felt it was right to do and necessary but a reluctance out of my own personal experience. It was interesting because that young man that had the nervous breakdown said to me one night you're so positive but that's how I was raised and he said the reason you're so positive Gloria is because you've always been surrounded by love. That was true but I had never realized that. My family had afforded me so much support and you're really very naive. It's like when you're 5 years old and you go to kindergarten you think everybody loves Gloria and then you meet all those rotten kids that want to kick you in the shins and tie your hair in
knots and you think gee, I hate this place. Well, I was still in my 40's and very much that naive. I loved Gloria, my family loved Gloria and why doesn't everybody. It really upset me because people said things about me that didn't know me and that really hurt. Of course part of the reason was that my name was in the guide (?) and I did things and it got around. I had people calling me up with hate phone calls.

During the road fight or earlier?

After the church thing and during the road fight.

And you survived it?

I said to one of these girls—she grew up in the neighborhood and I knew her—I said wait a minute Erma, I want Augie to pick up the other line 'cause I'm gonna sue you. What did she say?

She didn't call after that.

One of the things that we were talking about last night is that community organizing has been going on for a long time and is not necessarily something that is fairly new, however, the term community organizing and the people who we now call community organizers is relatively new from about '68, '69. What do you think about that whole movement?

Here in east Baltimore it was perceived as a threat even by people like myself and it was perceived as a threat mainly because those people who had the organizing skills were people from other places. I can remember in the early days of organizing SICO the politicians' favorite phrase was 'that bunch from Chicago.' We never had an organizer from Chicago but that was how we were identified because of the thing. I was aghast because it made me damn angry that in this day and age we needed a paid person to represent and speak for us. That really blew my mind in terms of democracy, democratic politics, and neighborhood organization or group organization because as a kid growing up we always had some clout as either a church group, a neighborhood group political entity. My next door neighbor was a ward boss and my younger sister used to say 'oh, God, Mr. Craft when he dies is going to be right up there with St. Peter' and he was good; he provided coal, food, jobs for people, he helped people get into hospitals. My mother was his biggest
runner and I told you she had arthritis. My mother never moved off a chair; she'd sit on a corner on election day. She worked every year on election day for Mr. Craft. She used to make $5, $10, had a helluva good time, get a red face from sitting in the sun and carrying on. I had grown up with that kind of thing and I was really aghast that we had to have a paid professional.

When did you get to a point that you saw that was necessary?

Well, it was kind of an education process. After the disillusionment with the church thing, one of the young men, a Methodist minister who was an officer in what we call Ketron Christian Council which was ( ) church cluster, recognized that we needed a larger organization because he was vice-president to our pastor who was president of the organization and our pastor had already begun the process of trying to enlarge that group and was in conversation with the archdiocese. Barbara Mikulski had sought him out, knowing what we were doing in Canton, to talk about what our organization was doing. She put together a meeting of Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy which in those days was still unheard of. Individual priests and Protestant pastors were friends and might meet one another in Hausner's bar because it was a stag bar (Protestant ministers never went to a bar, they went to Hausner's to drink) but it was never something that was common knowledge. After Vatican II, of course it became an accepted thing that they should talk with one another and do things together. I know when Barbara put together that first meeting I got hysterical because Jim came home to tell me about it and I was not part of that organizing group because I was a treasurer and was raising money. Jim took the girl that was secretary of our group to that meeting 'cause she had more time; I was already on overload. He came down to tell me 'Gloria, you would have died because when I got there, Monsignor Egan from St. Brigitte's came over and grabbed my hand and said Jim, I'm so glad you're here. I know you.' Jim was very much taken with the fact that this older clergy who he had a great deal of respect for needed him in that room to be comfortable. What happened was after the first 2 meetings May came around when the archdiocese makes moves and the older pastors
that were uncomfortable with what was going on, they had all their young assistants moved to the boon docks. So they very subtly just like politicians, they sat and listened to everything and then moved in their own way and that's how they took care of that threat. Then Jim had the breakdown in June and left the church so everything had kind of fallen apart and was in shambles but Alex Tickner had begun to organize professional people in the neighborhood who were conscious of changes and were at least willing to sit down. The last meeting that I went to of the executive committee for Canton Christian Council, I turned over to the pastor all the records that I had--I had 2 cardboard ( ) files full of financial records and program material and I turned that all over to Paul and I resigned. I then said that I had to leave to meet Alex across the street at St. Brigitte's for an organizing meeting of a larger group. He said you can indulge Alex but nothing will come of it. I went across the street and Alex had assembled the nuns that were the superiors of 3 of the parochial schools, he had 2 or 3 heads of PTAs, he had the librarian from Canton, he had Health Dept reps from the Bank St. clinic and Highlandtown and he had a couple businessmen from Highlandtown. That group hung together as the steering committee through that winter and it was interesting because St. Paul's Lutheran Church had just called a young man as an assistant pastor to do community work and I met him at that meeting. His name was Al Bauman and Al had enough spark and freshness to keep us alive but by the first of the year Al told me 'that thing is going absolutely nowhere, too many professionals and the neighborhood people that are there are really intimidated.' This is the kind of neighborhood that traditionally has handed over authority and leadership to whatever that authority figure is whether it's a priest, a pastor, a doctor, a lawyer, a banker; the people bowed to their decisions thinking they were better educated, had more experiences etc. I went to a couple meetings and I said I can't continue coming because I've heard all this; I heard how you build an organization so many times that I like Alex could get up and draw the diagrams on the board and I didn't want to spend any more time with that. What happened beyond that was that Al, with the energy to do things
and having just come to the church and being challenged to do things in the
community, began to build different organizations because the city had zoning or-
dinance that had been in work for 3 years and the following fall was going to come
up for passage in city council and CPWA was mailing to organizations whether they
were members or not, bulletins on this zoning law about what was going to happen
what the changes were going to be in different neighborhoods. At the same time the
city had hired district planners for the 6 districts in the city who were supposed
to be advocate planners which meant that when the planner came here to work he was
going to work with us and for us rather than being the planning department's repre-
sentative in our neighborhood. Some of those district planners took that advocate
role very seriously and we brought in the young man that was assigned to this
neighborhood who was a young Roman Catholic boy out of the Pittsburgh area, Al
piss and vinegar, he came from a nice suburban neighborhood. Mike then with Al
agreed to do intensive training with any group of ten people we could get together
that was willing to sit down with maps and examine the zoning changes and ramifi-
cations in our neighborhood. So what happened was Alex continued with that group
-- he had some joint funding from Metropolitan offices of the different church
denominations, the archdiocese kicked in maybe 2500 or $3000, Monsignor Egan
gave them a room at the church, the Lutheran churches contributed and the Methodist
United Church of Christ kicked in 5000, so we began to have some operating money;
we were using college and high school students to do the foot work. The Lutheran
church gave us a worker and paid the salary. They had a man they had hired for
Lutheran Social Services to begin to do some social outreach and it was very good
training for him to come over and run our office with the young people we had hired
for the summer. They did an intensive survey just talking to people about where
their heads were and how long they had lived here and what their perceptions were
of the neighborhood and the changes. Of course at that point in time the drug
culture was really beginning to emerge and it had filtered down from the college age
to high school students and we were beginning to have problems with our young people because of that. So there were a lot of indicators out there that it was the right time to do these things. At another time you could not have brought in other people to do organizing and gotten away with it. Even with the early organizing in GICO, we had to put breaks on the organizers because there are certain things that east Baltimore would not accept in terms of the (Am.Ind.) style of organizing. I'm easily turned off to confrontation. You would make me angry before you would recruit me. It's definitely a neighborhood where you have to get their attention.

But wouldn't you say the road fight was confrontive?

It was but it was done with a great deal of humor and people will accept that. While we were always truthful and straightforward, we always kept a sense of humor and a lot of levity.

(Change sides). You would sing songs to your antagonists?

Yeah, we were the first ones to introduce coffee and doughnuts at a road hearing. One of our friends in Pils Point had huge insulated, you know the insulated jugs that you can serve hot and cold in at a picnic—she had 2 or 3 of those. I said Jean, I'll take the collection if you get the jugs together and we carried 3 jugs to Edmonson High School and we served coffee and tea and cookies and doughnuts in the rear of the auditorium and had a sign with donations accepted. Then after that they set up their own coffee pots at hearings.

So what do you think has happened to community organizing over the years? One of the things we talked about last night was that it was on a decline. Do you agree? It's on a decline because as I said, number 1, money is drying up for organizing. Will that be filled with volunteers, do you think?

It will have to be to a certain extent and that's where the challenge comes in to people like myself who have certain skills and can do things, although I have to tell you quite frankly, unless it was something quite life-threatening, I doubt very seriously whether I'd lead any kind of a fight again. I got into trouble within the organization at SECO much like I got into trouble at church; women used to say
to me 'you never wash dishes.' Well I had a lot of skills that I used in church that to me were more important than washing dishes. It wasn't that I thought I was too good to wash dishes but I could do things that dishwashers couldn't, so there were days that I went in the kitchen and I washed dishes because my soul needed it and other people's souls needed to see me do it. I used to take the nursery twice a year because the pastor said that was good for my soul, because I was very uncomfortable with little people. I can handle a baby like Alexander but when they get to walking around they drive my bonkers because their attention span is about 2 seconds. That's too much energy for me. I love when their minds develop and they can talk. That's why I always worked with teenagers because they were a challenge. With the church thing I washed dishes and took the nursery because I needed the discipline. Within the organization I used to get a lot of flak because I wouldn't work picket lines and stuff. But I thought I had served my time in the trenches, on the picket line, and I don't get a great deal of fun out of that. It's fun the first time but after that it's work. MAD picketed Mayor Schaeffer's fundraiser at the Civic Center in 1970 when he ran for election in '71 for the first time. They had 6 pickets. Well, baby if I'm going to picket the Civic Center at a political fundraiser, I'm going to have 200 people or I'm not going to show up. Because all that did was feed individual egos and show how ineffective MAD was. I won't do that in a neighborhood fight. If you don't have a picket line that is decent and represents something, my ego doesn't need that. In the early stages of the road fight which pre-dated SECO, the organization that fought the road was called SCAR, Southeast Council Against the Road. The original organizer on that was interesting because Betty Beacon mentioned last night about the Housing Dept having community organizers...well, Tom Fiorello was an organizer that was hired by the interstate division for the city of Baltimore when they had the design concept team which was this 9 million dollar contract that was written for interdisciplinary teams--engineers, sociologists, architects, what have you, they had all of them--and he was hired as part of that group. The first meeting that he chaired in east Baltimore about the road, he dared to entertain the notion of no road. The next
day his boss called him and said 'you don't let people talk about no road at all, you have them talk about whether they want a y-shaped interchange or whether they want a cloverleaf interchange or whether they want 6 or 8 lanes.' Tom said that's dishonest and the guy said you're fired and Tom said I resign. He was fortunate in that Embry picked him up as an organizer in HCD and he had found an apartment in Fells Point and he was renting from the Eppners who were shakers and louvers in the road fight in Fells Point. He then began to teach Jean and Dr. Eppner the organizing skills and confrontation skills. The group that Alex Tickner had organized, the larger group in Canton, one of the first things that Alex found out was he and Jim Larson had gone out of the initial meetings they had to the archdiocese and had a meeting with some of the planners at the archdiocese and they suggested that they go to the city planning dep't and look at the city's 5 year plan, the master plan for capital improvements in Baltimore. Well the only thing that was programmed for east Baltimore in capital improvements was an 8 lane highway. There were no new schools, no new libraries, there was nothing that had any kind of social value to the area but we were going to have 16 lanes of superhighway jammed down our throat. And that was the spark that ignited the road fight because from looking at that, they said you really ought to have a meeting in your neighborhood to get reactions to these plans for building that road because they can't build it without citizen participation. And you're going to have people organize you so that they can speak at meetings and know what they're speaking about rather than just saying we don't want it. One of the first meetings they had was in Jan. probably '69 at St. Brigitte's. Alex invited members of the interstate team to come out and do the presentation. Tom Fiorello came from Fells Point and there was a woman named Betty who was a member of the League of Women Voters and she was on their transportation committee and she and Tom did the advocacy thing—why the road wasn't necessary and what the economics of it were—so that in that evening, no one in that room ever dealt with the road per se, whether it was 3 lanes or 6 lanes or whatever, whether it was an interchange; we just looked at the drawings and said that's great and had all this architecture pencilled in, and they said
Joint development is a figment of the Fed's imagination. It's there but it's not there and when the road is built, it's going to be there and you're not necessarily going to have all those good things they're promising you because that's pie in the sky. So from that point we were invited to a meeting at Tom's house in Falls Point the following week and there was 3 or 4 of us from Canton and Highlandtown that went to that meeting and out of that meeting, the SCAR group developed and Tom chaired it. He was then taking law courses at U. of Maryland Law School and when he finished his law degree, he left Baltimore and at that point in time, Mike Mueller took over as chairman. We built that advocate planner from this group. He was really turned on to find this many people who were willing to give...I guess in those days I was putting in 20 hours a week volunteer work in meetings.

You were working too?.

Well, I had really just started back to work 'cause I didn't go to work for the bank until Nov. of '68 and I only worked 2 days a week. The only thing was that I was getting so intensely involved with all the volunteer stuff that very often my 2 days a week at the bank would get in the way. I was always signing proxies to go to Washington to do this and that when I couldn't get a day off. That's how I drew other people into this. Al Bauman was our financial expert. He could take a road budget and pull it apart and in 10 minutes convince everybody in the room that there was never going to be enough money in the city of Baltimore to build it. The very very worst extrapolations that he did were never as bad as the present situation we find ourselves in terms of( ). We certainly didn't know that inflation was going to continue and grow at the rate that it did.

Another thing we talked about last night was self-serving, that community organization only works and only comes together when and when the people only get involved when it serves their own interests which the road obviously was one of those things. Do you think that that is always true?

Yeah. I think it's true whether it's getting trash picked up, whether it's getting a library, whether it's getting a house facility, whether it's cleaning up the school for whatever reason; unless I am personally involved, you find very few freaks on
the fringe like that have long vision. I've always thought in 10 and 20 years as opposed to this month or 3 months down the line. I had the kind of mind that makes connections. It was really freaky because in the road fight we developed so much rhetoric and one of my pet things was to say that gasoline was drying up and was going to become more expensive, that socially we couldn't afford to have 4 cars in a family. The proof in the pudding now is in this neighborhood, when everybody is frightened when they hit an intersection, because the way cars are parked there is no way that you can tell what's coming. You almost have to get into the middle of the intersection before you can see. Years ago, those corners always had to be kept clear but the reason they're parked that way nowadays is because in most households there is more than one car. The city streets just don't have that much parking space. We're fortunate we've got the supermarket lots over here that we can overflow to. But in most neighborhoods they can't. Well I do not think that in good conscious as Americans we can afford all of us to drive. That's not a right, it's a privilege. My personal stake in getting involved was anger because was leaving the neighborhood and that made me angry because why should I not be able to buy a bottle of milk across the street. More institutions were closing and changing.

Do you think that part of the reason that you have this long-range vision is that you have lived in one area for so much of your life that you can in fact want to take part in the change?

I think that's an individual thing. I think I do because I'm Gloria and because of the way my head works and because of the way I was raised. My father challenged every one of us from my earliest memories; you could disagree but you could never disagree for the sake of being disagreeable. Any argument you had to make, walk. And he'd still turn around and say 'you're full of shit.' I learned how to make decisions and how to reason in this household and all of us were that way. In-laws get very upset with us when the whole family gets together because in many cases they think we're going to have big brawls.
Now tell me if community organizing is based on self interest and what is going to be best for the immediate or for the long range, where do community organizers fit in?

One of the problems with the organizers is that they're becoming dinosaurs too. They have to change with change. One of the thing McNealy is doing now is running that center training organizers to be developers that they can begin to re-think. Is that Neighborhood Institutes?

No,

I guess that's Dick Cook.

I don't really have any respect for Dick Cook because Dick Cook still uses an awful lot of confrontation. I don't really believe in raising people's expectations of what you can't deliver and I think that's what organizers do. I guess that's my biggest argument. The other thing I've always said and I've trained organizers this way--organizers serve at my pleasure, I don't serve them. They're here by invitation. I allow them and they have to operate under our rules while they're here and if they don't they're not going to stay. The most effective organizers are the ones that even if they're from another place, they move into and become part of that neighborhood that they're serving.

I noticed that some organizers will work here for awhile the will move onto some place else for awhile. Do you think that's a good thing?

Yeah. And the other thing is that they gotta do some growing and if they don't they're not effective. A person should not be an organizer at 35.

When should they be an organizer?

Right out of school.

Do you see it like missionary work, kind of?

Yeah. During the war, the Air Force had the youngest generals because you make fighter pilots out of 18 year-olds because they didn't have sense enough to be afraid and once they got into trouble, they were no longer effective as fighter pilots. Organizers have to be fresh idealistic and full of piss and vinegar.
Organizers get burnt out so they should always have another career opportunity. I think organizing is probably the best job training anybody could have for making them a valuable person in anything that they do because they certainly begin to understand interaction with people on a person to person basis. An organizer that does not respect the neighborhood person he is working with is not worth the pattern ( ) that belonged to him.

Do you think as people get older and more worn out they tend not to have that respect for the neighborhood people anymore?

No, I think you do and I think the other thing is that you become ( ). As they say organizations are coopted by the city, organizers become coopted by leaders and you get into factional things. I am a good effective leader and I may be very wrong in a certain position. An organizer is going to choose sides because it's Gloria saying it and that's wrong. An organizer that took a position because I took it I would not have a great deal of respect for. I appreciate an organizer who says to me you're out of line. He's only effective when he can do that. He also has to do that one-to-one, not in the community. If I'm out there making mistakes he better let me go ahead and make them because I don't grow if I don't do it. An organizer that's a mother hen that plans and manages everything is not a good organizer because your people never learn and never grow. They become organizer-dependent. When you're up there flying, you've got to be able to develop the gut feelings for what's happening in this room; what's the dynamics and when the thing begins to change, you have to recognize that and say well, I'm going to go with plan B. Then you also have to know what you can do and what you can get away with because as I said to you last night when I was talking about the situation with the trustees and I was being businesslike and professional, I was getting nowhere. Then I got obnoxious and said 'hey, I am trying to do this and you are doing that and I want you out of here. I don't even want to talk to you because my business is not with you, you work for them, my business is with them.' Then I began to get some respect and response. It's a question of knowing what you as an individual can get away with. I have on occasion when I have been somewhere
with Joe McNealy, he respects my guts and very often on a gut level I can say 'you can't do this. I can't give you a good reason for it if you pay me but I can tell you that my stomach is in turmoil about it and I need time' and Joe would always say to me 'I trust your guts'. He was willing to retreat and rethink things. Very often in a meeting if I was talking and I would pick up something, I would go on a completely different tack and Joe would get panicky but he was at least smart enough to not jump in and try to save the situation. He would play along with me knowing I had picked up something that he hadn't. But very often organizers plan things so much that the volunteer leader is not equipped to go with whatever that break is and it may be a positive break or a negative break but it's something that your instincts begin to pick up. Betty Deacon is very good at that. It's something we learned from working together. We knew that in a given meeting there would be a number of people there and we would begin to anticipate reactions to things. We had some people who we knew where they would be coming from all the time and it was going to be negative. So you would take a strong person and sit them next to that negative. That's what I was talking to about in terms of your form, of seating your audience. Rather than having your panel there which is a set piece that can in itself become intimidating and set the tone, if you have spread throughout the audience a number of people that are going to come in with a key question, that will facilitate your whole discussion. Sometimes we've done a pincher approach and taken 2 people and moved them on somebody to just very quietly take them out of the discussion so we could move this thing along. We've had situations where we've gotten almost into a box because we were in such hairy discussions. Nobody wanted to say the word. And then it becomes the question of who's going to be daring enough to bring it to a head. McNealy did it one time. Joe is a really good organizer in terms of prepping his people, moving them into a situation and letting them run it, and then debriefing them afterwards and doing constructive criticism of the operation. I appreciate that. A lot of neighborhood people can't handle that kind of thing. To me it was a challenge but again
I was raised with that. Good organizers can do that. All organizers don't have that skill. Some organizers are better people, other ones are better process people, other ones are very good planners. A lot of people that get into organizing get into it because they're idealistic and they may think right but they really don't have the equipment to operate as an organizer. A lot of those are the ones that get involved with the organizer burn-out because they really get dumped on. If I go to a meeting and the organizer taking the notes and he does the telephoning and the minutes and mails them out, he doesn't have a group. He's a flunkie for a group that's using him.

So he really needs to facilitate.

The first thing you do when you run your organizing meeting is to have somebody that's at least willing to sit there with a pencil and paper and take care of the attendance. The next thing you say is we need a volunteer recorder. Before the meeting is over you need to decide on the next meeting date and get 3 people to make phone calls to remind people. If an organizer can't do that he's really not going to be very good at working an issue because you've got to know that much about people. Those are at least the minimum goals you should set for a meeting. Your next job is the next day to contact all those people so that you can further salve them. While they're doing that, they're at the same time going after data concerned with that issue.

Do you think that with the changes in the economy...if the larger issues are in fact what people are so concerned with thinking about, what is the future of these neighborhood organizations?

It's going to be hard, Helen.