"WITH THAT LAST SUGGESTION ALONE, YOU JUST EARNED YOUR PAY!"

A VOLUNTEER CONSULTANT'S STORY

This is the diary of a gypsy consultant.

I've spent the last thirty months mainly on the road, trying to get some sense of organized volunteerism in the late twentieth century and trying in some small way to contribute to its preparation for the twenty-first. There were stopovers of a week to three months each in 46 communities in 15 states, one province, and the District of Columbia. Some places were visited twice or more; the appendix lists them all.

This is an attempt to trace the history of the journey, some general conclusions reached, the kinds of questions raised. A number of technical articles, published or planned, will deal more deeply with many of the topics touched on here. This is mode in the nature of an informal personal report, to friends and colleagues. Just some impressions.

Prior to this intensive 2½ year period, my work history spanned about 20 years in organized volunteerism as volunteer, volunteer coordinator, interim director of a volunteer center, trainer, consultant, writer and researcher/evaluator. It was wonderfully rewarding work. Naturally the satisfaction was occasionally flawed, and steadily these flaws grew to fullblown frustrations, duly recorded below:

- (1) I was tired of doing one-day workshops and walking off into the sunset, never taking direct responsibility for what happened to the ideas and the people who tried to implement them; it began to smack of running away. I was also most weary of fast encounters with fine people never to see them again for five years—or ever. So a centerpiece of planning became the opportunity to follow up work—shops and consultations on site, for at least a week, and preferably up to sever—al months, maybe also to return for check—back visits a month or more later. The frustrations of fleeting contact and what I believe I learned to do about that, are recorded in my "Stretched Workshop" article in Journal of Volunteer Administration.
- (2) Related, I was worried about my "national level" tendency to over-simplify and glamorize an increasingly remote past in the trenches, to speculate and theorize grandly, without fresh reality testing on the front lines. Therefore, localism was a second key—to be there with local volunteer people doing, planning or just plain suffering things together with local resource centers. "Grass Roots", if you like. So mainly, I worked with and through local volunteer centers and associations of volunteer coordinators (DOVs, DOVIAs), sometimes also with RSVPs, city government, neighborhood organizations, anti-poverty and social service programs, and community coalitions.
- (3) I was concerned about doing work mainly for people who could pay for it. Please don't misunderstand; I'm not knocking money. Some of my best clients had money—good people and organizations. It was just that so many of the volunteer groups I was most interested in did not come close to having the kind of money to pay my standard fees—at that time about \$500 per workshop day and \$150-200 per consulting day. Include here low-income leadership training groups, neighborhood organizations, anti-hunger groups, self-help groups, DOVIAs and DOVs. smaller—the volunteer centers, larger—town volunteer centers, etc.

So far, project components involved follow through in the front lines with impecunious organizations. This is clearly a case for volunteering. And

why not? For twenty years, I had been urging other people to volunteer. Why not do some more of it myself? Nearly 80% of my time as it turned out, mainly in previously accustomed roles as trainer, consultant, evaluator, in organizational and program development, and as fundraiser and writer. There were some more offbeat (for me) roles, too; for example, gleaner, assistant to the Marketmaster at a farmer's/artisan's market, cat caretaker, flower planter for a church (which later claimed to be the only Episcopal Church in America with a Jewish gardener), sandwich board carrier, and jail inmate. The last-named was only for purposes of a volunteer program video promo-honest!

As expected, but hardly ever recognized, the alleged teacher learned far more than he taught from these volunteer experiences. Such learning comes equally from how you see yourself and how others see you. On the latter, inaccuracies were as instructive as valid perceptions. On one occasion or another I was mistaken for (1) a Methodist(honored), (2) a retired farmer, (3) A community organizer (4) a Buddhist (5) a neighborhood worker (6) a dogcatcher and (7) a husband. Let me rapidly explain the last. I was voluntary guinea pig in a workshop exercise to determine optimum volunteer placement. Apparently, the placement people failed to take into account whatever it is that preserved a 60-year-old in stubborn lifelong bachelorhood. Anyhow, I asked for a letter of recommendation in writing-didn't get one. (8) Also somewhat surprising was to be asked several times to consult and evaluate re woman-man relational problems. Finally, and most intriguing of all on the (presumably) misperceptions was this remark reported to me by a friend: "That man is either a Psychiatrist or a transient"

In any case, the experience reinforced emotionally some things I already knew intellectually about volunteering, for example: serious volunteers are still powerfully respected. In fact, there are a whole lot of things you can do more effectively from the volunteer vantage point. And confirmed: Everyone has something to give; our job is to give them a chance to give it. that's the hard part. Finally, I was more impressed than ever with the discontinuity between ideology and behavior—at least sometimes. I met quite a few ideological pariahs (by my standards) who were also individual saints. Finally, volunteering can be great FUN and there's lots you can do as a volunteer that you could never get paid to do.

Actually, this was more stipended or expense-reimbursed volunteering. Work sponsors were asked to defray room, board, travel and other work-related expenses, or donate some in-kind equivalent. To cover cases where they couldn't, and for other living expenses, I sold my house, car and land to provide modest income for about ten years. Being single, I was able to cut loose, though I must say that not having any home at all for over two years, somewhat soured my taste for singlehood. The places where sponsors put me up-almost always with my prior permission—included many motels and college conference centers, and a number of private homes (where I learned to accept generously offered help). Otherwise, accomodations ranged from palaces to places with no running water, from penthouses to outhouses. There were several fine bed and breakfast establishments, a youth hostel (to my somewhat startled inquiry, they defined "youth" as "ability to climb unassisted to the upper burn and a girls dorm (where presumably the qualification was staying in your bunk), a nunnery (full of peace and beaty) a mansion once owned by one of the wealthiest families in America (full of gold bathroom fixtures), a mental institution for

*Also, in several case, I was alle to earn in-oute for Opensors, most or all of the money They needed to rembuse my expensed.

several months (a truly caring place) and a quiet meditative community (memory). I also had one neurotic landlady, so designated because she thought me neurotic.

(4) Finally, I was tired of being a closet visionary known, if at all, for projects, proposals, and perspectives somewhat outside mainline development of organized volunteerism. Some had tole me this came from being ahead of my time; I wondered sometimes if it were more just off to the side. In any case, the catch-22 is that people who think you're impractical never give you a chance to practice—certainly not if it's going to cost them money. So I hoped people would let me try some more offbeat stuff as a volunteer, if I also pitched in on some more immediately practical projects for them. Usually, such negotiations worked out well for both sides. Indeed, we often turned out to be on the same side.

Overall, I was groping towards a volunteerism which would be more volunteer-owned and autonomous, broader and deeper in application to daily life for all people. I hoped all this could somehow be integrated with what I saw as the largely subsidiary role of today's organized volunteerism—subsidiary to agencies, subsidiary intellectually, and inaccessible to many people. The hope was to gain some experience in the application of this perspective and register it as part of the data base for directing volunteerism into the twenty-first century. A mouthful that. If actual project areas do not sound nearly as radical or grandiose, that is all to the good.

(1) Networking and Coalition-Building, not just teaching workshops but tracking and trying out aftermaths. (where networking is considered a kind of "horizontal" people—to—people volunteering.) In Mississippi, the Governor gave plaques not to individual volunteers, but to volunteer networks, which had lasted six months or more since a workshop—start—plus—follow—up on that topic. There were similarly satisfying experiences elsewhere, but also a lingering suspicion that for some people and organizations, escalation in rhetoric was substituting for improvement in behavior on networking. Others, sadly, seemed to pervert the network concept as a means of blocking out new ideas and people.

I came out of these experiences wanting to stress that the words "network" and "coalition-building" referred to more than a vague ambience of cooperative intent; rather, they designated a large and varied set of specific methods and strategies. This experience helped me identify and clarify some of these, which now are increasingly getting into print—and trainings.

In addition to local and state networks, encouraged ex, started, monitored, and, where possible, evaluated, there were two national networking pilot tests launched during this period. Bridge-Builders, one of them. is no longer in existence. The National DOVIA Network is just finishing its second year. Again, there was the overall conviction that networking is a basic form of people-to-people or group-to-group volunteering which can be deliberately planned and implemented, just as are the more "vertical" forms of volunteer programs.

(2) <u>Developing Tocal Grass Roots Power for Volunteerism</u>, by helping to start or strengthen local volunteer centers and local associations of volunteer leaders (sometimes called DOVs or DOVIAs). During the 30-month journeying, I worked directly in this way with 20 volunteer centers and 17 DOVIAs, published national network-facilitating directories of each, and a national newsletter for DOVIAs. There was also some work with RSVPs, Community Action Agencies and neighborhood organizations. I came out with a renewed conviction that such grass roots strengthening holds far more promise than previously dominant "top down"

strategies for organizing volunteerism. But there are problems, too, among them the sheer massiveness of the emerging local resource structure for volunteerism. An overall directory I prepared during this period listed nearly two thousand such entities in North America, 70 in one medium-sized state alone! Other concerns include the inability of some volunteer center directors to realize that they are no longer the sole proprietors of volunteerism in their community but must instead operate as catalysts or coordinators of a broad coalition for volunteerism—and positively glory in that role. Potentially, this alliance for volunteerism includes the volunteer center, DOVIA, RSVP, the City or County Volunteer Office, the Chamber of Commerce, The Junior League, the local college(s), the religious community, corporations (The Corporate Volunteer Council, if there is one), the local social services volunteer coordinator, the media, possibly the library, and maybe many others. I saw several volunteer centers doing famously because they recognized the need for this major change in mode of operation; others failed because they couldn't or wouldn't grasp the changed reality; still struggling for prominence as the local "owner" of volunteerism when they should be rejoicing at the achievement of so many more co-owners.

A similar kind of issue lurked in the unwillingness of some DOVIAs to broaden their membership welcome much beyond paid directors of agency-related volunteer programs—(fine as these people are, they are only one part of the total volunteer leadership picture.). This restrictiveness is accomplished by such means as narrowing definition/eligibility for membership, high dues, and over-emphasis on certification or academic qualifications. Such selectivity keeps things neat and elite but neglects major dimensions in volunteerism such as policy, advocacy, monitoring, and dramatization (as in Hands Across America, Ride for Life, etc.). Also largely missed are important non-agency settings such as the all-volunteer group and the independent "freelance" volunteer(as incommunity leadership training). In one state, organized volunteerism leaders raised a great hue and cry when the state office of volunteerism appeared to move in the direction of community leadership (non-agency or agency volunteerism).

Overall, I began to see how much some of us have tended to define volunteerism as What a volunteer Coordinator might be paid to do", neglecting all else. The more usual approach is to define a field first, and on that basis roles within it. We appear conversly to defined the field in terms of one role within it.

(3) Volunteer coordinators are still the core offit, however, at least for me) and they are as wonderful as ever; gallant, talented, still underpaid and overworked, truly dedicated. Training in basics for careerists is more accessible and effective than ever, and the careerist is more skilled than ever in these basics. Yet, there seems to be an insufficiency of advanced training to challenge the experienced or the merely curious and creative. The field, it seems to me, has become an increasingly uncomfortable place for dreamers. The personal-cum-professional need to be safe and well-liked increasingly dominates imagination and exploration. The need to feel special by being selective and exclusive exceeds the wish to reach out and include poeple—and ideas. Neighboring fields such as community development and community organization are rarely explored and integrated. To be sure, a number of volunteer coordinators, especially in rural areas, actually operate significantly as community developers or community organizers. But rarely does top management recognize or even legitimize such activities as a part of community volunteer leadership.

Power, if dealt with at all, is understood and applied in a micro framework, within one's own program box, so to speak(e.g. influencing your boss, resolving conflicts with peers or supervisors in your organization), Macro applications of power are ordinarily ignored or shied away from, e.g. anything that smacks of collective action for benefits above and beyond one's program, for volunteerism generally. Too bad. We have 100 million volunteers and

over 100,000 volunteer coordinators, and a national professional association with about 1% of that number as eligible individual members. That organization badly needs to ask itself if this is because at some level it really wants to be small and exclusive; otherwise how explain all that talent and dedication unable to attract more people.

Again, at a board meeting for an excellent large statewide association for volunteer coordinators, a board member announced that her boss had just arbitrarily eliminated her position. Much sympathy, but an insufficiency of outrage, if you ask me, and nary an inkling that the board as a group should at least Later, I found another statewide DOVAL board that try to protest the action. was trying to mobilize some collective action, in a similar situation, but might suffer a key resignation because of it. I came to believe, in all of this, that there was nothing wrong with organized volunteerism that a dozen good community organizers couldn't cure. I am not holding my breath until they are hired, however, or if hired, used. This is slightly incredible in a field where you keep running into people who have had community organization experience but seemed to shuck those skills and perspectives at the door of volunteer administration. I kept having this outrageous visualization of Saul Alinsky sipping tea with the Ladies' Garden Club--all the more outrageous because as individuals many of these ladies could more than hold their own with Saul.

I am even less optimistic about the potential of organized volunteerism for collective advocacy on social issues in general (as distinct from itself as an occupation). There has always been some identity-tension in our field. To What extent are we a social movement? A Profession? A Business? Since Hat Naylor's death, we have lacked a consistent, eloquent voice for the primary responsibility as a social movement. Among the remaining two, profession seems the more visible and certainly the more respectable today. But even as a profession we tend to view ourselves largely as a derivative, auxilliary of other disciplines; we seem neither willing nor able to reach down deep inside ourselves to identify what we have that is original and authentic to offer the world as teacher. Surely there must be something special—and precious—in an archtypical situation in which people work voluntarily and not primarily for money in a world where work under pressure or mandate and for money is the rule.

Finally, I think all of us policy-setters and policy-suggesters need to take a fresh look at some basic facts on careerists as they actually are to-day and see if that leads us to some different conclusions about what should best be done with, for and (unhappily) TO them by leadership. Here I would hope policy-sectters could give the lie to Scheier's first law which states that irrelevance varies as the square of the distance from the front lines. Facts:

(0) Most careerists don't have a lot of money to spend on professional development. They just do not have it.

(b) Careerists are, and should be multi-faceted generalists, not in any sense narrow specialists.

(D) As a field, their engagement is far wider, actually and potentially, than volunteer service programs in agencies.

(a) Many, if not most, work only part time as volunteer coordinators. Their other concurrent work roles need to be viewed more as opportunities-to-be-integrated on behalf of volunteers, and less as distractions.

(A)For many, and probably most, the field becomes a transitional occupation on the way to somewhere else, almost always more responsible and remunerative. We need to know far more about where they go and what they might do for/with us as alumnae. We also need more insight into why so many do leave the field. "Not enough money" explains some of it but surely not all. I expect our failure to creatively challenge advanced practitioners has some role here, too.

The above impossions prompted some pilot test studies of the career and some discussions with local association (DOVIA) people with intent to identify and clarify a broader range of career options, and pathways to more appropriate levels of status, challenge and financial compensation. There are a couple of publications out on this, more on the way.

(4) For struggling community groups, developing and helping to implement earned revenue fundraising strategies as an alternative to increasingly scarce grant or donated funding. I participated in some fairly spectacular failures here, learned some lessons and came away favoring a promising new method called "cause-related advertising" There's a publication on it.

(5) Futuring for volunteerism taken down from sweeping national predictions to local forecasts, has the same value as a local vs. a national weather prediction—it's a far more useful basis for behavior. I participated in 2-5 year futuring studies for several state—level agencies, one statewide network of volunteer centers, one DOVIA, and one entire community, Duluth Minnesota. I was pleased to find our field mature enough to want to look ahead that far, and confident to accept the consequences of doing so.

(6) Other less frequent project areas included community leadership training for low-income people; application of volunteer leadership concepts and methods to enhancing satisfaction and effectiveness in paid employment; Involvement Week as an inclusive way of recognizing and encouraging volunteering, more by doing than by talking [I got impatient enough at the latter to draft an unworth sequel to Sue Vineyard's wonderful "Beyond Banquests..." called "Banquets, BBLAH..." which I plan to let cool a while before serving up; some information systems development; strengthening neighborhood volunteer groups, and some work with hunger and low-income housing efforts.

CONSEQUENCES, EPILOGUE AND ANOTHER PROLOGUE

Work sponsors have prepared some evaluative reports and some of them keep me posted periodically, on the results of my volunteer visit. Thanks to you all: I've borrowed more than a little from you for this diary and plan someday to collect your reports all in one place. My perception of results is informally in this diary, more formally in a series of articles, five or six of which are published now, with more on the way. (These aught to be listed as a supplement to this diary, and will be, eventually). But most of all, the vehicle for doing something about results is an Institute for the Advanced Study of Volunteerism headquartered in Santa Fe, New Mexico as of September, 1986. The belief that such an Institute was needed was one major result of the journey; The Institute is in fact directly designed to deal on a continuing basis with the incomplete promises and promising questions uncovered in my journey. For the next seven or eight years my volunteering will be devoted primarily to my role as Director of this Institute, though this will also involve some travel and on-site visits to other places, as before. Several on-site projects are currently being negotiated. (Descriptive material on the Institute is available on request, in case not attached here)

But I hope many other people will be traveling too, as volunteer consultants, from now on. Something called a "Circuit Rider" program was one spinoff of the journey. By way of easing into a description of that program, let me say that I wasn't always sure about anyone else, but I learned plenty, Much of the time, the richness and variety of experience threatened to overwhelm my ability to process it. And I sometimes worried the experience could too readily be used selectively to reinforce pre-existing prejudices. Maybe; but there were just enough surprises and reversals to allay that fear somewhat. There were also process in the country intervence or merely witnessed, inspired or only interrupted.

Still, the stipended volunteer model seemed to work reasonably well overall was and I kept meeting people who thought they might like to try it for themselves sometime. So, one follow-up purpose picked up along the way was to evaluate, refine, and expand my own experience as a model for a national clearinghouse of volunteer project consultants. It's called "Circuit Riders" and a pilot test is underway at this writing. Materials available on request.

Mind you, there are still some questions to be answered about the model, some flaws to fix. Thus, when is it better to visit for one solid period vs. one or more spaced visits? And what more can we do about the organization which is too poorly organized to sponsor a visit—yet, partly for that very reason needs one most? Finally, on two occasions an executive's pre-project verbal approval apparently didn't go deep enough; later they effectively sidetracked the project. How can that be prevented from happening again?

Regardless of model, here are some very general reflections on what I think I learned:

--- Change is slow...slow...slower than aspiration, with an elastic response to enthusiasm.

—time and perseverance alone won't produce change, however desireable, in the unready. You can't push the river and you shouldn't try to plant before the fields are dry. In other words, you can't really move people where they aren't ready to go. But if they happen to be ready to go a certain way, and you're glad of that, you can help provide people with opportunity and encouragement to go their way. In one community, a project never really took off after months of careful textbook planning; the same kind of project took off like a rocket after one day in another community. Effectively diagnosing readiness is a far more useful skill than powerful pushing against it.

Related. Since in the end you only get people to do what they really want to do (you can help them realize what, but the process can get tricky), look for projects that seem to generate rather than absorb energy. Beware the fatigue response and watch it when you seem to be asking people for more and more sacrifice rather than offerrring them more and more opportunity, and straining to restrain them, actually. Your new project/program must create energy, not destroy it, support key people rather than drain them more. Again, I remember one promising project that took a year to fail, draining many people all the way, leaving too little energy to pursue two "accidental" fundraising leads that looked to me like they could have taken off. Like the earlier parallel example I gave, it may have been that the unsuccessful projects were as much the victims of elegant planning as their beneficiaries.

---It often seems like you've got to try most all of the wrong ways before you find the right ones. This makes courage to try the wrong ways even more precious.

---Copying programs from other communities does not work as often as people think. This is because other communities are more "other" than you think

If all this sounds uncharacteristically diffident, the modesty is richly justified by the experience.

As personally valuable to mean the experience were the many occasions encouraging humility, the grand theories that didn't work, the things people turned out not to need me to tell them how to do. One early summer evening in a friendly, small city in Ontoario, no one in the neighborhood showed up to hear my lecture on how to establish neighborhood networks. Turns out the folks were all out enjoying a neighborhood softball game, no doubt getting some great networks going in their own way! Then, just when I thought I had discovered every possible readon people walked out on my workshops, one more happened. I was talking to a group of volunteer firefighters and the alarm went off. Finally, there was that sincere unsolicited comment (to a volunteer consultant, remember; "With that suggestion alone, you just earned your pay!" gasp!

Technology also came in for some cutting-down-to-size, in my opinion, anyhow. Not incidentally, there were several technical workshops in spiritual settings—among them, churches, a Buddhist Temple and a Gold Dome devoted to meditation. I was very comfortable with these settings, more comfortable certain with the Duck.

settings than with the purely technological. For example, I sensed two sophisticated computer networks with (what seemed to me) trivial content. Then there was that marvelous cordless mike I was stopped just short of taking with me into the mens' room at the break.

Over and over again, I was reminded that technology alone doesn't solve problems and might sometimes even create them (yes, virtually a platitude, but dramatized here). In one large city, a proud resident showed me the corner where the first stoplight ever invented was installed. Minutes later, a turn of conversation revealed that in that neighborhood, it was now dangerous to stop for a red light at night!

As for the rewards of the work, they were mainly the people, the new friends and old, the meaningfulness of the work itself, the opportunity to learn so much, and a few smiles along the way. Above all, though, was the excitement and inspiration of many many wondrous people and events. As just one sample, I met the first (I believe) local politician ever to get elected on "more volunteer programs" as a major campaign pledge. And on a return visit I had the privilege of meeting the new city coordinator of volunteers, on her first day of work redeeming that campaign pledge. Sometimes the payback was less direct, more symbolic. I conducted a regional yolunteer workshop for the Salvation Army one summer. Come Thanksgiving I was walking along the beach in a very different part of the country and a car pulls up, the driver kindly asking if he could take me to a free turkey dinner. Yes, a Salvation Army Volunteer. (I would have gone but for the liklihood of depriving someone more needy. I'd already gotten the kind of sustenance I needed from the encounter).

There was so much recognition and encouragement beyond the usual range of pins, button, badges, and certificates. (those, too, and a couple of keys to city's which were particularly nice because with the key they also showed me the door). Three times folks just bought a "local color" t-shirt and all signed it. Once they all signed while I was wearing the shirt; I was quite tickled by that. Anyhow, there's three t-shirts I'll never wash. Then there was the corny maybe but caring certainly, woodcarving about leaving footprints on our hearts. A couple of 4-H award ribbons right from the county fair are as precious to me as to any 4-Hityouth who really won them. And then after years of using as a glad gift example "I like to wash dishes and am pretty good at it", they finally gave me an inscribed dishtowel!

But most valued of all was the honor of being given a hearing for my ideas by some wonderfully talented, caring people. Thank you, all.

One day, wandering around near the end of a not particularly effective consultation, I walked into one office and stood there stunned. The simple, beautifully lettered poster was just about everything I needed to have said to me then, and still today. It said:

IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO BE HUMAN THAN TO BE IMPORTANT

They told me it was by one of their former high school volunteers and (I never asked verbally) they generously gave it to me before I left, for home. I have it home with me to look at, and maybe it's a theme.....

Ivan Scheier, P.O. Box 5434, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 87502

Tryped by hand

Places by Length of Time

2-4 MONTHS-WEST VIRGINIA, MICHIGAN, MINNESOTA, COLORADO (twice)

2 WEEKS to 2 MONTHS----MISSISSIPPI; BEAUMONI, TEXAS; TARRANI COUNTY,
TEXAS; NEW MEXICO; SANIA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA; ONTARIO; FLINI
MICHIGAN; DULUTH, MINNESOTA.

APPROX. 1-2 weeks ALL THOSE LISTED BEDOW NOT ALREADY MENTIONED.

Alabama Tuscaloosa Birmingham

Arkansas Texarkana Little Rock

California Santa Barbara

Colorado Boulder Denver

Delaware

Dover

Wilmington

Dewey Beach

DISTRUT of
Columbia
Washington

Michigan
Battle Creek
Lansing
Traverse City
Alpena

¥ Flint

Minneapolis

XSt. Paul

XSt. Cloud

XWinona

XRochester

XDuluth

(S)Minnesota

Mississippi Jackson Biloxi Clarksdale

✓ <u>Ohio</u>

★ Cleveland
Columbus

Ontario

**Belleville

**Kingston

**Napanee

Toronto

New Mexico
Albuquerque
Santa Fe
Roswell

New York Buffalo

North Dakota ★Fargo-Moorehead

> Pennsylvania Philadelphia

Texas
Beaumont
Austin
Arlington
Fort Worth
Longview
Marshall
Texarkana

West Virginia

* Parkersburg

Charleston

Key *= Volunteer Centers worked with

DOVIAS worked with

State Offices of Volunteerism

Please Note: This list does not include locations of "for fee" work which occupied about 20% of my time during this period