

## WWF Annual Philanthropy Celebration

January 7, 2013

Keynote Address by Martha Kongsgaard

“les femmes philanthropiques: vive la difference!”

Merci beaucoup Kaycee

Bonjour. Soyez bienvenu tout-le-monde a la dix-septieme reunion annuelle de la foundation des femmes de Washington.

Et maintenant, vous allez repeter après moi: écouter et repeter:

Je suis ...une femme... philanthropique: Vive la difference!

Encore une fois, plus fort! (We can't hear you 100 in the spill over room)

(And just by the way, the French word Philanthropy is feminine, as is la difference!)

What an honor and pleasure to have been asked to join you all – nearly 500 of you, this evening on this 17<sup>th</sup> annual gathering. I was asked to address you all at the end of our second year after the inaugural key note which was given by one of the greats of the pacific northwest by any measure, an early WWF member and a great mentor to many of us, Patsy Collins – of loving memory - who among many other unforgettable pieces of sage and salty philanthropic advice, once said to me – Martha – just because you are a “nice girl” doesn't mean you can't say NO, you know, so repeat after me: I am not an ATM, I am not an ATM, I am not an ATM, Aand the not to be forgotten quip about the Greeks, who in creating the model for Western Democracy, *she would remind any who would listen*, used the word 'idiot' to describe people incapable of participating in civic life...

As an aside, I remember well being a bit alarmed at having been asked to be your second annual key note after the standard had been set by the likes of Patsy since I had been asked the year before to address a conference called Woman and Philanthropy, (I kept militating for calling it Women IN philanthropy- we've come a long way) for the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the guild system at Children's hospital, which was to head line Melinda French Gates and Hillary Rodham Clinton (Martha Jane chopped liver Kongsgaard) bath room break. The others were to talk about volunteerism and community building and I was to talk about the topic that was without a speaker (probably for good reason): money. I was young and naïve enough to think it was a pretty integral part of the deal....

----- Early on in my philanthropic learning curve I was once at a Philanthropy NW family affinity gathering when the topic of grant guidelines came up. In a quandary and without any at our foundation, I announced that it would make a difference if ones grants were huge or small on how complex the grantee's proposal might need to be so wouldn't it be helpful here to go around the table and say how much money we all give away - which was met with a, in retrospect predictable but insurmountable northwestern wall of Silence -----

But now I am digressing from my digression.

Back to the convention center: I regaled the members of the guild society with stories of their illustrious history at Children's hospital, which was founded by women, financed by women who for then 90 years had provided world class child health care while annually raising hair raising amounts, tens of millions of dollars for uncompensated care, which inevitably led to my posing what I

thought was a largely rhetorical question that would create a rousing moment of sisterly solidarity in the convention hall:

“Let’s have a show of hands of you who consider yourselves philanthropists.” Not a single one of the 1000 women in the convention center raised their hand...(ok, maybe colleen and her daughter did)...”I didn’t say Philanders...” I said philanthropists.... (And t hat was 5 years before any one had even heard of Monica Lewinsky)

I also remember being in quite a panic when the head of the hospital development department called and asked for a ‘head shot’ for the brochure. I thought brain scan, MRI, what, a professional photo? As “the mom”, the last shot any one had taken of me was me screaming as I went off the slide at the Coleman pool. The shot in this brochure I think is from that vintage. It was a sweet gesture, who ever dug it up at WWF, it was nice to look back.

So it is with that historical perspective that I look back, as does the exhibit upstairs which I have used as a template for my research for these remarks. This invitation has afforded me the unusual luxury and the welcome opportunity, to ponder where we’ve been, how we got here, and where we might think about going as a group, as a movement, as a community, as individual actors, as we all fly half blind into a future none of us can yet imagine but which, if the last 17 years are any kind of predictive prelude, we, as a cohort, as an institution (which we are old enough to say we surely are), as a group of smart, strategic, compassionate but data driven savvy sisters, will undoubtedly find ourselves navigating at the cutting edge of what some call with awe and pride - this non-governmental universe that WWF lives in and shapes – this force

for good, this sector called America's passing lane, or the civic heart of prosperity.

Most of you know and the rest of you should know a bit about the history of this group. And this from the web site blurb: "In September 1995, Colleen Willoughby (whom I am sure you all know) wave your hand, Colleen) and four other visionary women established the Washington Women's Foundation, enabling women to pool their financial resources to make large high-impact gifts to improve our community, while developing their skills as philanthropists," the two lode stars of WWF. The approach was innovative and appealing and attracted over 100 Seattle-area women to be founding members. Today, the Foundation has over 500 members, and the grant committee reviews more than 250 Letters of Inquiry annually. Since 1996, our members together have invested over 12,000,000 dollars in hundreds of nonprofit organizations. The draw here is that giving together allows more individuals to participate in philanthropy and provides members the opportunity to leverage their single gift with others for maximum benefit to their communities.

From large pooled grants of \$100,000 that send what I would call a courageous and focused chunk of funds to single organizations to the nimble, in the moment, new special response grants like the funds sent last summer to the Red Cross to help displaced families as the Taylor Bridge wild fire raged between Cle Elum and Ellensburg.

Our work is a 360 degree wrap of intense, hands -on, shoe leather, community-needs-driven diligence on the one hand book ended by a voracious appetite for data, analysis, and strategic risk taking , creating a kind of philanthropic adaptive management learning loop for social change and investment in the public good.

In 2005, on the occasion of Colleen's retirement from the foundation, a sub-group of members set out to raise two million audacious dollars to create the CW endowment, which would set us on track to fiscal sustainability. That fund, now at our 5th year milestone, has a balance of 3 million dollars having grown with the help of 415 donors who understood the singular role that endowments play in financially sound and maturing organizations. It's been brilliant, as this year it will contribute nearly 100k to help support the programs of WWF. I was on that committee. It was a machine, driven by some of the powerhouses of this membership - no flash, communal high expectations, hands on, all action. It was an idea whose time had come. You - members and friends - all took to it like a skier to powder - the conditions were right and it was fun. It is remarkable what we as a group can do together that we cannot by definition accomplish alone. So take a bow you all.

I know that in normal polite company naming names is bad form... it's brash, brazen, self-important, people get left out and erroneously put in. But for those of you who aren't members yet (we are not evangelical, by the way, but we are enthusiastic and open for business and would love to have you join us if you aren't already a member. There is something here for the neophyte and experienced community activist alike.) And for those of you who are, you'll forgive me if I stop and say thanks to those who made this work possible (Don't be intimidated by this gang. You will also find mere mortals among our ranks *comme moi*.)

Because what wasn't said in that web intro were the names of the other 4 visionaries and briefly scanning their histories will tell us I think, something about the era in which WWF was born and the context in which it works today. Note, we could probably

randomly pluck any one of you in this room to be highlighted and I think we would see a certain pattern emerge, so observe with me:

- Anne Farrell, our regional glass ceiling ignorer par excellence, the pres and CEO of the Seattle Foundation, member of many corporate and NGO boards, first female head of Downtown Rotary, (the largest in the country, which didn't – nor did any Rotary world wide - admit women until 1986 - our International District did that year and the rest of the country followed suit after the Supreme Court 'insisted'!) And shatterer of the male leadership monopoly at the Rainier Club, inter alia... AND WATCHING THE GLASS LITTERING THE GROUND THERE WAS

Sue Lile Hunter, who as co-conspirator with Colleen and Anne and 5 other women (who did everything in this town) founded CityClub in 1980 - As was said, she was too old for Jr. League and too female for Rotary, in response to the dearth of co-ed, as it were, civic organizations in the community that provided a non-partisan forum for ideas and debate. A long time member of Seattle Junior League, Sue came of age when it was uncommon for women to work outside of the home, and so appreciated the professional volunteer training from the Jr. League. Understanding the sting of exclusion, City Club immediately allowed membership for all. Some 15 years later, this group of women would seek to remedy another lopsided fact of life - the lack of opportunities for women to fully participate in the then male dominated philanthropic sector.

Rhoda Altom, (the Benjamin Button of the group, still looking like a college freshman) a pioneering real estate investor and developer who started in the construction management world well before 'sexual harassment' had a name or a legal status. She too has chaired, cajoled, founded and nurtured multiple community treasures from the YWCA to Cornish, Children's, and

when she saw a need, she simply founded an NGO to fill the void or brought a whole refugee family into her family's life to help heal the world

And Faye Sarkowsky, who nearly without peer has been for many decades a huge presence and leader at INTER ALIA the University of Washington School of Medicine, Children's, SAM, United Way, ACT theater, The Seattle Foundation, the National Advisory Committee on the Arts and the Jewish Federation

Why tease out these women's attributes? And I would add to this list our current President, Carla Lewis - because I believe they are emblematic of the women who their brain child has attracted. You. You know, sometimes a group or their story can suffice for a sector's history and progression. WWF was birthed and grew during one of the most dynamic eras of American civic upheaval. The architects of the foundation and those women who followed simply rewrote, in their hallmark low key, no nonsense way, the history of philanthropy in this region and beyond.

And what in our culture and in the culture of their families informed these 5 rather quintessentially, if not all by birth, then by temperament, North westerners – more quiet, than loud, more discrete than brash, more serious than trivial - to take large portions of their lives, not a small amount of their fortunes, considerable gumption and give to this effort their focused and sustained investment in building women's leadership in Philanthropy and not even name the building after themselves? They saw a need and set out to remedy it. They saw that women did not enjoy the conditions required to attain the status of that heavy male word "Philanthropists" and set out to provide the corollary to Virginia Woolf's indispensable twins: an income of 500 pounds and a room of one's own.

But as I have been reading, and writing, and thinking about our collective experience at WWF, and my own philanthropic journey and while wandering the three floors above us here with Carla and Catherina, the wonderful curator of the exhibit who you will be hearing from in a bit, I must say that I've been stuck on an issue that this group doesn't spend much if any time thinking out loud or writing about; a fundamental matter one might say that we emphatically avoid or even assiduously eschew even in the face of its ubiquity, one that I have heard, at least in years past a time or two, flat out denied or more often nervously chatted around – one that resolutely sits at the center of our founding, at the heart of our operating guidelines and decision making philosophy, at the epicenter of our *raison d'être* – just to use up the rest of the French in my repertoire.

It sits there like a quiet but persistent sister at the center our work: a simple or mighty adjective, a possessive plural noun, a descriptor of more than half the human race, this singular announcer of gender that sits at the center of our association. Is it gender as a modifier, a declaration, a demarcation, a supplication, an apologia, a signal of refuge, I mean, ladies, are we braggin' or are we complainin' or are we just stating the facts, ma'am? Knowing the founders, it is probably the latter.

### “THE WASHINGTON WOMEN’S FOUNDATION”

It's not The Washington Foundation, not The Foundation. It's not The The. It is not created in contradistinction to a Washington Men's Foundation because there is no Washington Men's Foundation.. hmmm

As an aside, while looking at a college course catalogue with our



youngest son, he asked what 'feminist studies' were. I told him that it basically was an academic curriculum focusing on the roles and contributions of women in fields such as literature, art, history, and the social sciences, etc. To which he further logically inquired: "Then what do you call that same field of study for men: masculist studies?"

"No, darling," I responded: "We just call that history."

But since we at the Washington Women's Foundation chose this remarkable venue with this provocative exhibit announcing that *women take over* for our annual gathering (thank you SAM and Kim once again – It has been superb, an exhibit that for me was shattering, startling – and how lucky that we are the only venue in America that is hosting it) the question is unavoidable, even if unanswerable, or uncomfortable and different for each of us. Some might say in 2012 it is beside the point.

One can't help but reflect on what gender has to do with it anyway, at least here, today, at SAM

With the arrival of this magnificent exhibit from the national museum in Paris, one has been reminded often of the fact that In 1992, when four women were voted into the United States Senate for the first time in history, the news media declared it "The Year of the Woman." To which newly appointed Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland retorted, (as only she could) "Calling 1992 the Year of the Woman makes it sound like the Year of the Caribou or the Year of the Asparagus. We're not a fad, fancy, or a year."

(a record 20 women now serve in the senate 20 years later - which is 20% of that body with 18% of the House being female). The entire congressional delegation of the great

state of new Hampshire is female (live free or die, indeed! - we'll see how long that macho state motto holds up in the state that is the first to be not red nor blue but positively PINK!

But really, who cares? Should we care?

Does money have gender? Does Art? Does the good on the ground care where the check came from? Should the rescued orca or the scholarship student concern themselves with the root of the help, the process of the grantmaking? What is the difference between experiencing a Helen Frankenthaler or a Robert Motherwell? Does it change things to know they were married? Same question for Lee Krasner (or the genderless LK as she often signed her work) and Jackson Pollock. I went through the exhibit again 3 nights ago with our middle son and upon looking at the gorgeous Lee Krasner on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, he said, "I love it! It looks like Jackson Pollack." I did not slap him up the side of the head. A sonata by Robert or Clara Schumann. A novel by Thomas Mann or an essay by Virginia Woolf? Does it matter that Jackie Robinson got the only run in game four of the World Series which clinched the victory for the Orioles in 1966 as inner city America was on fire both literally and figuratively with civil rights turmoil?

Haven't we all, even those among us uninterested in the 'subject' and persistently allergic to the word feminist pondered what gender (or race or difference) has to do with any of all of it.

Of course we have. I had a classic- for -the -times confusing gender model in my Mum growing up. Mother was simply who she was - without announcement. Not unlike many in the room, she managed the money side of the house, the child rearing side

of the house, the extracurricular activities side of the house, the house side of the house – In fact, she managed everything. She was quite a typical homemaker. (Which is one of the abiding mysteries of my childhood in the 50's and 60's – how did you gentlemen - are there any of you in the room - get away with it?)

But, we knew instinctively that she was often the smartest person in the room; we knew she was any man's equal but we knew that she confidently (assiduously) was not the center of attention. Very low fuss, unflappable. By the end of the decade when Jackie Robinson hit that homer, when women were 20 years from being able to join Rotary, and had had the vote for only 40+ years, I was old enough to begin to experience the confusion created by my dear mother when this unintended pioneer, this confident trailblazer, this woman who knew as a young teenager in the 30's that she wanted to be a lawyer, dismissed our questions about women's liberation and glass ceilings – she was the Stanford educated lawyer who wrote wills and fielded phone calls from League of Women Voter members about ballot measures and candidates and “manned” the first female seat on a Bank Board in the 70's and with her pearls on, would get the side of beef out of the meet locker on her way home from chairing the Hospital Board's finance committee during the day and changed into her nice clothes and high heels to my father with a mad man cocktail after he got home from 'work' in the evening.

Mom: your book club: did you start a women's group or are you a group of women? Why are you so indifferent, so uninterested in what Betty Friedan has to say about the feminine mystique? You obviously agree with her! What difference does it make if our president is a woman or a man? What difference does it make if the check comes from a man or a woman? Help! It was confusing. She would with not a little irony give me the old saw: Ginger Rogers did the same thing as Fred Astaire. Only she

did it backward and in high heels. Good on her. What's the question?

Haven't' these issues of marginalization been resolved? Aren't we post gender? Isn't this anachronistic, démodé? The Elles@SAM invites us to see the "female artists from Pompidou" while they wouldn't (yet) send the same invitation to view the male artists from Pompidou. We'd just go see art. Why is this a landmark exhibition? Who thinks so? Historians? Feminists? What would a 26 year old American MBA student think? (Did you think I meant a female MBA student?)

But How about malala yousafzai, the 14 year old Pakistani girl who understood the transformational power of girls' access to the world of knowledge so well that she was feared enough by the Taliban that they tried to assassinate her? Or What of the physical therapy student from New Delhi looking for a bus ride home after seeing *The Life of Pi* with her boyfriend who got on the wrong bus and paid with her life for being the wrong gender? Or the 70% of the 1.5 billion people who live on less than a dollar a day who are women. As post-modern as we may feel in Seattle, make no mistake, the global struggle for gender equality, arguably the paramount moral struggle of this century, rages around the globe and the feminization of poverty is real even in America.

Does gender matter? Does race matter?  
Of course they do.

The patterns of leadership, access to capital, and knowledge are changing in this country and the context is shifting no less so here at the WWF. We women in Seattle, many of us, especially those of us in this room, live in relatively fresh freedom, thanks to those

unintended pioneers who plowed the heavy soils before us. We do still find power and community in doing this work together as women. And as Gloria Steinem would remind us, “loss of memory is a source of oppression.” That may sound too dramatic for some in the room. But we need to keep our “place at the campfire,” as she urges us. What we do and how we do it and THAT we do it matter. There is a long list of remarkable women that history has forgotten and we forget at our peril like the guide and translator for Lewis and Clark, Sacajawea, who made the same trip the men did while pregnant, nursing and carrying a toddler. (Same as Fred Astaire, only backward in heels).

We as a group and by example, on a strong platform, communally, in what I think is fair to say is a saliently female ethos, have the great power and privilege to learn, give and lead in this state for the greater good - for the region and for the women who are looking for the tools and camaraderie (even if most of you wouldn't say 'sisterhood') to participate in this singularly American tradition, but with a female twist - more inclusive, collaborative, more relational and as the boomers age, with more control of the majority of the country's private assets and though we make less (making still 80 cents on the dollar to a mans' wage) we give more by nearly a factor of 2.

We, at WWF, have tied our ambitions to growing a bigger table so that one day perhaps we will have outgrown our moniker and shed the second, central W (unlike those male trilateral initials frozen in history: FDR, JFK, LBJ...)

Which causes me to recount this story in closing that I heard some years ago about Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland, who after naming the various recent victories which had landed

women in national seats of power world wide, Angela Merkel in Germany, Ms. Johnson-Sirliel in Liberia, the Michele Bachelet in Chile to name a few (and now a south Korean president! – we'll get around to it one day) recounted that the then sitting president of Ireland, her friend Mary McAleese, had detailed to her the report of a sharp increase of poor Irish boys who could be seen across the green countryside, weeping on their mother's knees asking plaintively, "Why can't I grow up to the President, mum?"

Replace president with philanthropist. We are well on our way. Thank you, merci beaucoup et Vive la difference!