

Speaker 1: Welcome to TNS, The New School at Commonweal, a collaborative learning project exploring nature, culture and consciousness. Join us now for a TNS presentation of Commonweal's 40th anniversary celebration, including recorded reflections from Michael Lerner, Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen and Oren Slozberg.

Oren: Welcome to Commonweal. I'm so happy to have all of you here today. My name is Oren Slozberg and I am Commonweal's Chief Strategies Officer. I'm glad that everybody found their way here today with no street signs and without cell service and thousands of bicyclists. You have crossed over from the North American Plate to the Pacific Plate and you've entered a very special land. Here, where earth and sky and ocean mingle, is a place that has generated creativity, healing and a sense of possibility. Today we're here to celebrate a remarkable 40 years of vision, learning and action. You'll be hearing both Michael Lerner and Rachel Naomi Remen reflecting on the story of Commonweal. You will hear a lot today about our origins and about the revolutionary work that has been done here. If you take some time and you talk to Commonweal staff and board and long-time friends that are here, you'll learn about our healing entrance formative work around cancer, about our work around environmental toxins, our juvenile justice work and sustainable agriculture.

You'll hear about some of our past work in California, such as Burr's work on saving the California's coast and Rachel's program, helping doctors to remember that they're healers. A program that with our blessing has graduated to a new home at Wright State University after 25 years at Commonweal. Or you'll hear about the exciting new things going on here, designed to bring the wisdom of Commonweal out to the world and to entrust it into the hands of new generations of change-makers. For instance, our regenerative design institute is a destination for young people in their 20s and 30s who come here to learn skills that they can take forward with them to their communities. Our Power of Hope summer camp teaches arts and activism skills to teenagers, primarily teenagers of color from around the Bay Area. Our gatherings bring together a diverse intergenerational group of artists, thinkers and social entrepreneurs to get to know each other, build community and dream new futures. We are also home to Visual Thinking Strategies. A program that has used visual art and facilitated discussions to teach critical thinking and productive engagement to over a million children worldwide.

Our New School houses discussions with inspiring scientists, many of you are here, teachers, artists, activists and healers, and captures them on podcast as an enduring resource. The New School Sonoma series, which we just started, hosted an inspiring 90-minute conversation with Holly Near just last Monday. What else do we have? Rebecca Katz's Healing Kitchen Institute that keeps finding new ways to provide wisdom about food and health into the hands of doctors, chefs and basically anyone with a kitchen. Kate Holcombe's Healing Yoga program makes yoga accessible to anyone in need of healing.

What is it that is happening now at Commonweal? What is changing? While we hear about the last 40 years, aren't we wondering about the next 40? These are hard times we live in. We hear it. We see it. We feel it in our bones, everywhere we look. Maybe because of this, Michael often likens Commonweal to a medieval monastery. We are a repository of wisdom, developed, nurtured, guarded. Even this building looks like a

vault. With our newest programs, we're moving into a new era.

If I were to draw a metaphor from this physical space, it is not that of a vault. I would reach back to 1914, over a century ago, when Marconi established this place to house the wireless, sending messages to ships at sea. In fact, this building is still referred to as the RCA Transmitting Station by the National Park Service, who also happen to be our partners and landlords. Thank you, NPS. Here now, 40 years after Commonweal's emergence and a century after planting this building on this land, we are moving from being a monastery to being once again a transmitting station. We will find new ways to transmit what we have learned, our values, our curiosity and our commitment to healing to tomorrow's change-makers. We don't always know exactly how that work will look like, what they will be doing. We don't know the new expertise that will emerge in response to new times and new problems, but we'll be here.

Through our gatherings, our Power of Hope camp, our New School, our 5,000 member Collaborative on Health and the Environment, the work of Visual Thinking Strategies, RDI's permaculture skill building, our Healing Circles and other healing programs that have built an international learning network out of the Cancer Help Program, we are launching Commonweal into the future. We are relaying what we've learned forward. By developing the potential of tomorrow's leaders, we are broadcasting wide, not knowing exactly which ships will be there to receive our transmission and because there will be other ships as well who will be receiving that message. Five years ago we could not have predicted what the portfolio of Commonweal programs would be today, but this organization, this community, has proven to be nimble and adaptable. As new issues and new problems arise in our world, visionaries emerge to develop new ideas and new projects and they will find their home here at Commonweal. Let me welcome you to this monastery, this keeper of hidden wisdom and to this transmitting station, which will bounce that wisdom into tomorrow.

Now I have the honor to introduce you to one of those visionaries. Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen was one of the founders of the Cancer Help Program and the founder of ISHI, The Institute for the Study of Health and Illness, which is the container that holds the Healer's Art training, which is now offered in over 90 medical schools internationally. She's the author of two bestselling books, *Kitchen Table Wisdom* and *My Grandfather's Blessings*. Just today a graduate of the Cancer Help Program was telling me how each time, when he opens that book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, something new emerges. That book has been translated to over 23 languages and sold over a million copies. Please welcome my friend and teacher, Rachel.

Rachel: I've been asked say a few words about Commonweal. Let me start by saying something about the land. This is very special piece of land. We're very fortunate to be here. It was believed to be a chakra on the face of the earth, a doorway between what is present and what is future. long before these buildings were built here, the Indians believed that. We have been in keeping with the nature of the land here. I don't think of Commonweal as a group of programs. I mean, it's often very impressive when we list our programs and the reach that they have into many different levels of society. I think of Commonweal as a process, a process which enables the future to become real. Real. The

future is very rarely recognized by the majority of people. In a crowd of thousands, the future has usually spoken to 1 or 2 people. They're usually odd people. People who don't fit into the present very well. People who set things up in their garage or in a dorm room when they're cutting class. People who will create a world of greater connectivity. People who in many ways earn the criticism and ridicule of the majority.

Often, they're people who don't know how to run spreadsheets and create budgets and do the things that the majority can do to create whatever it is that they are creating. Commonweal has created a place of safety for such people to follow the ways in which the future has spoken to them. It has created a community of support for that process. You know, most programs come about because an organization has an idea, "It would be a good idea if we had such a program," and then you hire people to staff that program. That's never the way a Commonweal program has happened. A Commonweal program has emerged from the people who came, from the way that the future has spoken to them. The people are the cause of the program. They have not been hired to run the program. They've been born to run it. If you want to think of it that way. They've been attracted to the land, to the portal that they sense may be here and the manifestation of this portal, which are these buildings.

I think I can make this real for people by simply talking about myself and my own history, how I came here and what happened. I used to ask people, "How did you meet your husband or wife?" I'd collect all these stories, fate and purpose that brought people together. Often they were mysterious stories. I want to tell you the story by which I met Commonweal. I had been invited by a friend, Ken Pelletier, who told me he had a donor, a very, very rich dentist, who wanted to do something, and he wasn't quite sure, but it had something to do with medicine and would I be willing to come to lunch with a group of other people and talk to this man to help Ken in his process of raising money. I said, "Sure." I walk into this little restaurant in San Francisco, there's a table full of people. I don't know any of them other than Ken. I sit down and I turn to the person next to me and I say, "Hello. I'm Naomi Remen." He says, "Hello, I'm Michael Lerner."

Now, at that time I was an outlier in medicine. I was a crazy person. I had very strange ideas which I had to keep to myself because my professional credibility would be imperiled by them. The ideas that I had, because of my own life experience of chronic illness which began when I was 16, was that healing was the center of medicine, not cure. It's something that's hidden in a soul, that we needed to study healing, we needed to understand healing. Without healing, science and technique could do nothing, that science and technique engaged healing, and that we needed to study how to strengthen healing in people, how they could strengthen it in themselves. This was a very strange idea. Somehow I started talking to Michael about it and he began talking to me about his ideas about healing. We were having a wonderful conversation. Then we looked up and we were alone at the table. Lunch had been ordered. Lunch had been served. We missed the whole thing. The question is, then, what happened? What happened next? What happened for me?

I started to try and write about this, the process that happened for me. Then I realized I had something better than that. I had a poem that was given to me by a friend which

captures exactly what happened for me. I'd like to read it to you. It's called, "Loving the Odd Child." "The everyday child needs socks and sandwiches, her hair combed, yes, and time to play, people to love. The everyday child needs constant care from you, so keep her warm and kindly sheltered, nourished and held. It's caring for the odd one which makes us whole again after long confusion's blundering and wishing she was normal. Love that little odd child and you will flower in unexpected ways, veering off the path that others gave you to carve new and tender territory in the mysterious dark wood. Give that odd child what she needs, a softer lamp light, all day at the zoo, art supplies for breakfast and an early exit from the loud party. Maybe she wants things you think are strange, but just believe in her. Let her hold those tiny tree frogs."

"Let her climb down off your lap to gather strange objects, her weird collections, her need for books, her fear of people crushing plants, her awkward dislike of your friends, her terribly low pain threshold. Gather each of these up in turn and kiss them and then put them down in front of her, loved. This is the new path taking you away from normal and towards yourself, towards the life you deeply long for, towards the odd words, the odd lover, the odd house. You were afraid if you gave into her there'd be no end to it and that is true, for the odd child is wild and tempting Shamaness, who given an inch will rise up dancing and gather you into her arms and sing her throaty off key melodies as she winds her way through the wood and steps into her odd place in the bright and peopled world. There she will shift the balance in some small, insignificant way that only she can understand, having changed you so completely into yourself that she is unafraid to reinvent the world."

That's what happened to me at Commonweal and it's happened to a lot of other people as well. You know, Commonweal's a process that's based on a cosmology. We look around us and we see the shortcomings in the world and we react often with judgment, anger. The cosmology of Commonweal is not that the world is broken. For me, the cosmology of Commonweal is that the world is hidden and there's an old Jewish story, a story of the birthday of the world, that sums it up. It says, "In the beginning, there was only the Holy darkness. Then, at some point in the history of things, the world as we know it, the world of a thousand, thousand things, emerged as a ray of light from the Holy darkness." Then, probably since this is a Jewish story, you know, there was an accident. The vessel holding the wholeness of the world broke open. The wholeness of the world was scattered into a thousand, thousand, thousand sparks of wholeness, which fell into all events and all people and all organizations where they remained deeply hidden until this very day. We, as a human race, have been born because we can uncover the hidden wholeness in everything. We can strengthen it, feed it, lift it up, make it visible again and thereby heal the world back into its original wholeness. The world is not broken. The world is hidden. That requires a very different kind of approach.

Now when I was four, my grandfather wanted me to understand that the hidden wholeness of the world was in relationship to me personally, that there was something personal in my relationship with this hidden-ness, the wholeness hidden in the world. I was four, so this was a tough message. He delivered it by giving me a little paper cup full of dirt. I lived in the top floor of a New York City tenement house. I had no idea about

dirt, other than I was supposed to avoid it. He took me into the kitchen of our apartment and he put a little water on the dirt and he said, "Neshomeleh, if you put a little water in the cup every day, something can happen." Well, I had no idea what could happen if you put water on dirt in a little cup, but I love grandpa and I told him I'd do it. The first week was fun. I was waiting for something to happen. Nothing happened. Second week got harder and I began to worry. Maybe I was doing this wrong. When grandpa came to see me at the end of the second, I tried to give the cup back to him, but he wouldn't take it. He said, "Something can happen, Neshomeleh."

The third week was hard. I would forget. I'd wake up in the middle of the night and remember that I hadn't watered the cup. Remember, I'm 4 years old. I would go into the dark, into the kitchen, to water the cup. Keeping the demons at bay all the time I was in the dark watering the cup. Halfway through the third week, one morning, there were two little green leaves in the cup that had not been there the week before. I was astounded and I was sure my grandpa would be just as astounded. When he came the following weekend, I showed him this, but he wasn't surprised at all. What he said to me is, "Life is everywhere, Neshomeleh, even in the most ordinary and unexpected places." I was thrilled. I said, "All it needs is water, grandpa." He said, "No, Neshomeleh. All it needs is for you to believe that something can happen." This is a story about Commonweal and the process of Commonweal.

I'd like to close with something Michael told me a long time ago, which he denies that he told me, but I wrote it down. I was looking at it this morning on this yellow piece of paper, Michael. You had told me about a dream you had that you were in the little house that you were living in at the time in a very, very strong wind. The wind was shaking the little house on its foundations. As you were worrying because the whole house was shaking, a man and woman drove up in a pickup truck. They told you, "Michael, the wind is rising. The wind is rising. The wind is blowing all the ripe ones, all the ripe cherries, off the cherry trees. All we need to do is gather them up." The wind is rising and we are gathered up. We are Commonweal. Thank you, Michael.

Oren: As we're thinking about how do we thank all the people that are here, over the last 40 years, hundreds, if not thousands, of people have made the work of Commonweal real. It started with Michael, who had two partners, Caroline Brown and Burr Heneman. The three of them in 1976 created Commonweal and many other people as well. Our board of directors, which Michael calls our Wisdom Board, has guided Commonweal and is guiding it now. Thank you for your commitment and your guidance for all these years. The staff at Commonweal, there's a bunch of staff that have been here for over 20 years. Our staff are scattered all over the country. We actually have offices now on Langley, which is on Whidbey Island in Washington, as well as downtown Manhattan. There are over 40 people that are working at Commonweal. Arlene, Vanessa, Michael and I meet once a week and we're looking ahead at the next 40 years and we're going to make sure that this place continues to transmit.

There's so much of the work that is done here is done by volunteers. I don't think I could mention all of them. There's hundreds of people if we count the members of CHE, the Collaborative on Health and the Environment, there's thousands of people that are part

of the Commonweal community and they're all over the world. Everyday, there's someone out there who's working on one of Commonweal's programs, if it's within the work of healing, is it the work of health and environment, or maybe in one of our summer camps. To all those volunteers, those of you that are here, those who might be listening to the podcast, those who may never hear us, thank you for all your commitment and all your work.

We're almost done. This is the 40th, so we're going to take a little longer than usual. Now I would like to introduce you to one of the few people I can call a true mentor. Michael Lerner founded Commonweal with Burr and Caroline Brown in 1976. His commitment, wisdom and guidance are evident in every part of Commonweal. He founded many programs, too many of them to list, such as the Cancer Help Program, the Collaborative on Health and the Environment and Healing Circles. His vision has inspired organizations around the world and in other places, like the Smith Center in Washington DC, the Jenifer Altman Foundation and the Health and Environment Founders Network. As all of us here know, Michael is inspiring and unforgettable. Please welcome my friend and guide, Commonweal founder, Michael Lerner.

Michael: Thank you all. Thank you. Oren, thank you for that beautiful introduction. Rachel, thank you for your beautiful, beautiful words. I want to acknowledge again my co-founder of Commonweal, Burr Heneman. This place would not be here without Burr Heneman. He played an absolutely critical role in it. He also rewrote the laws governing California's fisheries and got them through the legislature, got the governor to pass them and implemented them. Not only we, but all the fish offshore, thank Burr Heneman for his work. I also want to thank my brother and a co-founder of Commonweal, Steve Lerner. Steve has done many things at Commonweal, but for a decade, Steve was the voice, along with David Steinhart, who joined him not long after. The two of them were the voice of justice at Commonweal. They were the ones who deeply cared about young people in the youth prison system of California and Steve went on to do extraordinary work on environmental justice, both in Norco, Louisiana, where he wrote a book for MIT called *Diamond: A Struggle for Environmental Justice* in Norco. He also wrote a second book that was on a whole set of similar places across the country, where low income communities of color faced terrible conditions as a result of being on the fence line with toxic plants. Steve, I thank you for your partnership and our many years of work together.

Announcer: You're listening to reflections from Commonweal's 40th anniversary celebration.

Michael: I'm going to start with two poems and a couple of lines from a minor prophet who lived 2,700 years ago. These poems are known to some of you but they speak to my heart. Some of you have heard me say them before. First one is called, "The Real Work" by Wendell Berry. "It may be that when we no longer know what to do, we have come to our real work, and that when we no longer know which way to go, we have come to our real journey. The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings." I'll read that again. "It may be that when we no longer know what to do, we have come to our real work, and that when we no longer know which way to go, we have come to our real journey. The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The

impeded stream is the one that sings."

The second, which many of you have heard me read, is by William Stafford and it's called, "The Way It Is." This connects deeply to what Rachel was saying about Commonweal, because I think that's also how Commonweal has the process, as Rachel says, by which Commonweal works. "There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change, but it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread, but it is hard for others to see. While you hold it, you can't get lost. Tragedies happen. People get hurt or die and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding. You don't ever let go of the thread." I'll read that one more time. "There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change, but it doesn't change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread, but it is hard for others to see. While you hold it, you can't get lost. Tragedies happen. People get hurt or die and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding. You don't ever let go of the thread."

The line I wanted to read from a minor prophet who lived 2,700 years ago in Israel, his name was Micah and he was a contemporary of Isaiah. He was the first prophet to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem. He also prophesied that a great leader would come out of Bethlehem. There's something, some lines of his, that are known as the Micah Mandate. Some of you may know these lines. "He has told you, oh man, what is good and what the Lord demands of you, but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God. He has told you, oh man, what is good and what the Lord demands of you, but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God."

Rachel has said from time to time something that for me echoes those words of Micah. She said, and I've never forgotten this, that sometimes she thinks that perhaps the purpose of life is to grow in wisdom and to learn to love better. That perhaps the purpose of life is to grow in wisdom and learn to love better. What these two quotations have in common is that they each have three parts to them. In Rachel's case it's purpose, love and wisdom. In Micah's case, it's justice, kindness and walking humbly. When you look behind those you find that both of them are versions of what goes back at least as far as the *Bhagavad Gita*, which was that there were three great yogas in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the yoga of love, the yoga of wisdom and the yoga of service. You can see, to do justice, which is wisdom, to love kindness, which is the yoga of love and to walk humbly, which is the yoga of service, is exactly the same as those three yogas in the *Bhagavad Gita* and it's the same as Rachel's. That the purpose, which is our dedication, our service of life, is to grow in wisdom and to learn to love better. Those three themes, those three yogas, really are the thread that we've tried not to let go of at Commonweal.

Those three things, which are not new. They are something that each of us, at best, remembers in our lives. That it's not something that anybody can teach us, but it's something that perhaps someone can help us uncover. What is Commonweal? One of the most interesting things about Commonweal is that 40 years later, it's still hard to describe. That's part of the beauty of it is that it appears in so many different ways to different people. It has different facets that people pick up depending on their place of

entry. If you work in juvenile justice, you know David Steinhart's work. If you work in marine conservation, you know Burr Heneman's work. If you work in environmental health, you know Sharyle Patton and Elise Miller's work. If you've been through the Cancer Help Program, or know about it, you know the Cancer Help Program and healing circles and so forth. If you come to New School events, you know the New School. There's so many facets. Over a dozen different programs.

I just want to take a moment, just as an example as how we continue to grow, to tell you that we have a new program. Our newest program is Angela Oh and Tu Ying Ming, who's program, The Gift of Compassion, has been a fiscally sponsored program at Commonweal for some time. After this last board meeting, it's become a new Commonweal project. We are deeply proud of their work. Tu is an incredibly gifted fine artist whose work was displayed here in the gallery. Angela is one of the great justice advocates in the United States and also a very gifted teacher of contemplative practice. The Gift of Compassion is a project based in Los Angeles that works with this combination of contemplative practice and art and works with a wide range of communities, not only in Los Angeles, but beyond. Angela and Tu are yet one more example of visionaries who found a home at Commonweal. Yet, they have a very unique creative voice. We are honored and delighted that this is the newest Commonweal program and we thank you both for being here today.

If we feel back, as Brother David Steindl-Rast often says, he likes to feel back along the meaning of words. If we feel back along the meaning of the word Commonweal, it gives us a hint as to what Commonweal is. Commonweal is an old English word that means the well being of the community. That's what it means. The well being of the community. It isn't any single facet of the community. It's the well being of the community. Of course, we over time, have developed these three areas of our work. Health and healing, education and the arts and environment and justice. Oren spoke about the over a dozen programs in those areas. What specific community does Commonweal refer to? First of all, it refers to the community of those who we touch in some way, both in the United States and really around the world. CHE has Collaborative on Health and the Environment. Elise Miller's program has 5,000 partners around the world that every day exchange dozens and dozens of emails debating how the environment is effecting human health. Many of our programs have that kind of outreach. The Regenerative Design Institute at the Commonweal garden. Rachel Remen's work. Many of our programs have that kind of global outreach.

There are those we touch and then there's the community of communities with whom we work. We're involved in multiple networks in all our different areas of other places, programs and people around the world that we work jointly with on things that we could never do by our self. The final meaning of community in the deepest sense is the community of life on earth. It is in the service of the community of life on earth that we work. Rachel once approached the great philosopher, Gregory Bateson, at a gathering and she didn't know him. She said to Bateson, "And who are you?" He said, "I am a friend of evolution." I would suggest that that's what the Commonweal community is. We are friends of evolution. In a fundamental way, we are friends of evolution. Of course, we have our story. I'm not sure our individual story as an organization matters

that much, but since we're here, it's just one of tens of thousands of stories of centers and communities like ours around the world.

It begins with a young man, about 31 years old, walking on Poplar Road in 1975 and looking out at this site from Poplar Road and having a very powerful vision. As my friend Tom Sargent says, it was actually cinematic. There was clouds and there was sun trickling through the clouds and then this shaft of light falls on this building, right? Honest to God, it fell on this building. I looked at this building and I was awestruck. I had the strong sense that we might create a healing center here and it might be about healing ourselves and healing the earth. I was living in Caroline Brown's garage with my girlfriend, Leslie Acoca, who became my first wife, and I walked in and Caroline was drying some dishes. We had already started Full Circle, the school for delinquent kids, together a few years before that in Dogtown. I told Caroline about this. She was drying dishes. She had long brown hair. She was about 35 at the time. I remember she was drying a dish and she looked at me with these hazel eyes and she said, "Why don't we try it?"

It makes me cry. It makes me cry because strong women have always been my partners among many others. In key periods of time, strong women have been my partners. Caroline Brown, Rachel Remen, my wife, Sharyle Patton, Elise Miller. I could go on with all of those who have had the strength to make these visions real. We did try it. Caroline called Burr Heneman because she knew we needed help. The three of us got together. Steve Lerner joined us shortly thereafter. We called up RCA. I said, "Hi, I'm Dr. Lerner. I'd like to start a center on your land. Would you give it to me?" They said no, but they'd sell it to me. I agreed to buy it for, I think it was 1.8 million dollars, something like that, that we didn't have. They agreed to sell it to us. Then Trust for Public Land decided that hey, that really belonged in the National Parks. We had a nice, vigorous conversation with Trust for Public Land. It ended up that we got this 50 year lease on the land and it went into the park and that's how it began.

That was '75. '76 is when it started. We grew it up, from '76 to '82. The early years, the Commonweal Clinic, which focused on learning disabled kids but also adults, Steve Lerner's Research Institute, the Garden with William Cambier and Avis Rappaport, the work renovating the site with a staff of 40 people on comprehensive employment training act salaries, a whole bunch of hippies just swarming over the site and fixing it up. We had no clue what we were doing, or at least I had no clue what I was doing. Burr has a wonderful line about me and my plans. He says he began to figure out early on that when Michael said he had a plan, it might change the next day. In any case, there was a plan for that moment in time. I think that that was not always a good approach. The thing that was true of me, and it's true to this day, I will put out a plan that sounds plausible, not in the belief that that's what we should actually do, but in the belief that others will say, "No way. Here's a better way to do it." I'm totally okay with the fact that what we end up doing may be quite different, even diametrically opposed to what I had thought we should do in the first place.

It's that sense of community that has been at the heart of this that it has never been

about one person's vision or realization or anything else. It's been a constant process from the very start, of partnership and community. Then in 1982, we lost all our funding, the place collapsed, I had to lay off 40 people, including myself. It was just hanging by a thread. It was at that point, or shortly there after, that I met my wife Sharyle, I met Waz Thomas at the Integral Yoga Institute. Shortly thereafter, the phone rang and I got a MacArthur Prize Fellowship, and suddenly this person who was hanging on by his fingernails at the edge of a cliff in Bolinas in a place that looked like it had failed, suddenly there were these people saying, "Take another look." It was the fact that funders decided to take another look that meant that the energy began to flow back and we rebuilt Commonweal on a new basis. The new basis was that rather than having a sense that we were going to run a set of fixed programs that would go on forever, it was going to be a place where, as Rachel has said, as Oren has said, where visionary people could come. If they had the skills to find the resources, they could do their work with great freedom.

That's what it's been ever since. It's been a place where visionaries come and they need to find their resources. Then they have the opportunity to do their work with great freedom. That's not always easy. I don't want to say this is some kind of simple formula. There's a lot of heartbreak that goes into that. Resources don't show up. People have to be laid off and so on. I also want to say here that we've talked about the program directors and the visionaries, but I want to say a word on behalf of the incredible staff who do the spreadsheets, who know how to do the finances, who know how to do all of the things that actually make these things happen. If you talk about community and partnership, a visionary without partners who know how to make a vision real, doesn't go anywhere. I just want to thank every person on this staff who does the humble work and the quiet, invisible work, of making this place real. They are absolutely as important as any of them.

It was in that rebuilding process that Waz Thomas showed up, Jenefer showed up, Rachel showed up, as she has described, my wife Sharyle showed up. We started the Cancer Help Program around 1985 and the years from '83 to 2003 were a period of rebuilding Commonweal. In 2003, I had a heart attack. It was not a bad heart attack, but it was a heart attack. It became very clear that we needed to reinforce leadership at Commonweal. The third phase of Commonweal was two remarkable executive directors, Charlotte Brody for four years, which I estimate, 2004 to 2008, and Susan Braun, which I estimate about 2009 to 2013. I'm not checking those dates. Each of them served here for four years. Each of them did extraordinary work. Their gifts in professionalizing Commonweal, in developing a professional staff and in their impact on program was extraordinary.

After Susan left, I did some deep thinking about the nature of leadership moving forward from there. That was the time when I began conversations with Oren Slozberg and with Arlene Allsman and Vanessa Marcotte. I had a real sense that there was a great deal to be said for working with two gifted young mothers who had homes in Bolinas and children in the school system and they were not going anywhere. I asked them both to take on a lot more responsibility. Susan Braun had done a great job in helping them prepare for this. As Oren said, Arlene and Vanessa have been really central to our

leadership team. Finding Oren was an incredible gift. He and I talked for, I think a year and a ... At least a year, about how we might work together. We picked the title, though it doesn't begin to do him justice, Chief Strategies Officer. What Oren is really doing is not only looking ahead at the next 40 years, but he's doing something else that's tremendously important. Justice has been part of Commonweal's work from its inception, but we were a grassroots organization living in a largely white community in Bolinas.

The pool of people that we could hire were largely white. We were a largely white work community doing work in justice, in health and healing, education, the arts, in environment and justice. One of the things that Oren set out to do from the start was to build real diversity into Commonweal programs. That is happening and it is happening in a very strong way. There are many manifestations of that, but one of them is the Power of Hope summer camps, we just did our second Power of Hope summer camp. These are incredible diverse groups of young people with millennial counselors who are equally diverse, both in ethnicity, in income, disparities, and also in gender orientation. These Power of Hope camps have the same transformative power as the Commonweal Cancer Help Program. It is very deeply reflective of what we've done. It goes back to our origins in work with at risk young people and it is very deeply reflective of the Cancer Help Program and deep healing work.

It is also deeply involved with our healing and arts work and so forth. With that work, with the millennial's work that Oren is doing, with the Visual Thinking Strategies which he brought to Commonweal, which touches many, many children across the country and around the world and which he ran for 10 years before he brought it to Commonweal. There is a reality and a commitment that we're not only a community committed to justice in a very profound way, but we are going to reflect the communities that we serve. You will see that as a fierce intention of Commonweal in the decade to come. You will see rooms that are no longer as white as this room is today and you will see more and more in the staff and on the boards. It is something that ... It is happening already and you can count on it. That is a profound intention.

I also want to say something about The New School. The New School, which Kyra Epstein so beautifully coordinates, as well as doing our communications, is the most fun that I have at Commonweal. Eric Karpeles, some of you know, is one of our interviewers at the New School as well as Steve Heilig, who is here today. Irwin Keller is another—Oren's husband—who is now doing wonderful programs up in Cotati. They just had an event with Holly Near and we are doing one with a Muslim colleague called The Muslim Next Door in a little while. Irwin has a tremendous gift for doing these things. In fact, he's attracting many more people to his sessions than I do to mine. It's spreading. It's growing in this organic way that Commonweal programs spread. The New School is about real education. It's not education in order to get a credential. It's not education in order to pass something. It's education looking at the great question, which are the questions that Rachel's asked for the last 30 years. Questions like, do we have a soul? Does the soul survive death? Is the universe alive? Do we have a purpose? Does humanity have a purpose? How do we live in these times? What is art?

Questions like that. It's the questions that we actually live with and it's a adult collaborative learning community where we go to ask those questions together. It's just so much fun. It's just such a joy. We work on a lot of heavy stuff. It's such a joy to have The New School as part of what we do. How does Commonweal actually work? There's collaborative leadership between the four of us, Oren, Arlene, Vanessa and myself, who basically support the program directors. The real leaders of Commonweal are the program directors. The program directors, as I've said, need to find their resources and they have freedom to do what they want. What are the values that underlie Commonweal's work? I've talked about them already. They are those three yogas of the Bhagavad Gita. There's kindness, which is the yoga of love, skillfulness or fairness, which is the yoga of wisdom and dedication, which is karma yoga, or the yoga of service. These are the great yogas of the heart, the head and the hands which you find in all the traditions.

Where are we going? We hope and intend to serve for many years to come. We really do hope that. We tend not to focus on the 10 year, 15 year, 20 year, 40 year timelines. We focus practically on what's in front of us right now and with visions that guide us like a commitment to diversity, a commitment to justice, a commitment to healing, to education and art, those parts of our mission. We focus on the work that is before us right now, but let me say something about the work that is before us right now. In less than 50 days, the United States is going to make a decision that will shape the context of our work for many years to come. We do not know what the outcome of that decision will be. We do know this. Whatever the outcome of that decision, we will be here doing the work, shaped by events, shifting our tactics and sometimes our strategies as events require.

The thread, the underlying thread, we never let go of. We're able to face lots of things that cause more distress in other organizations with less fear, less anxiety and a kind of serenity and courage that we will know when the time comes what we need to do. We will find guidance. The people that we need to do the work will continue to show up. It's that sense that this life is far too precious to lead it in anxiety and fear and "woe is me" and "woe is us" about what may happen. Rather, to say, "You know, we can't control what happens." We can do everything we can to direct events in the direction that we care about, but if the universe gives us really hard times to deal with, that's why we're here. We're here for hard times. We are heavy weather sailors. We've been heavy weather sailors from the start. When the heavy weather shows up, we are neither frightened nor disturbed. We just know that we were born for these times. We were put here for these times. We will continue to serve for as long as we have strength and breath to do that.

The way to face those challenges is with courage of heart, peace of mind and dedication of service. We'll work together. We'll heal together. We'll care for the earth together. We'll care for each other. We'll serve together. We'll remember three simple things. We're here to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly in service to the community of life on earth. Thank you for being here. Bless you all. We could not do this without you and we're so grateful that you came to celebrate these 40 years with us. Thanks so much.

Speaker 1: You've been listening to reflections from Commonweal's 40th anniversary celebration. Thank you for listening to TNS, The New School at Commonweal. The New School at Commonweal is directed by Michael Lerner. Our program coordinator is Kyra Epstein. Our audio producer is Ken Adams and our theme music is by Suzanne Ciani. Visit us online at TNS.Commonweal.Org. That's TNS.Commonweal.Org. You can also find us on SoundCloud, iTunes, Facebook, YouTube and Vimeo. Thanks for listening.