

Why I Organize c. 2000

By Jim Drake

As a child I grew up in a home which was regulated by the seasonal and daily schedule of the public school calendar. This was of great comfort to me in my youth. Every summer my father and mother had about three months “free” and my vacation and theirs aligned perfectly; my dad came home promptly at 4:00 p.m. and we ate “supper” at 5:00 p.m. the dot. We never missed a Sunday in church together.

I did not choose a life that would toss all of this order and sensibly into the toilet. Somehow, it chose me. When I was 24 I was drawn to the movement madness of the early 1960's. I moved from being a humble servant of the farm workers causa to being a driven, half-mad “organizer”. I sacrificed health, family, and wealth on the altar of winning-is-everything. I was like a \$5/week professional football player.

Organizing, until I was 40, meant winning on the short term. Get the grapes out of A and P Grocery Chain....every store was a victory. I enjoyed a million victories of this sort, but all ended in defeat. The organization itself crashed and burned and the pyramid of victories is little more than raw material for a novel I hope to write around the year 2005.

But, at 40, even with a little perspective on how the first 15 years of my organizing career had been for naught, I moved ahead into even more complicated contexts in which to organize. Somehow, I began to understand that organizing was for the purpose of organization, not for victories. I went to Mississippi determined not to let the cause, the issue, dominate. I had a gut feeling that just bringing persons (black and white) into new configurations of relationship was worth the bother. The vehicle became a woodcutters association. The cause was now relational power. I had never heard the term, had not encountered the IAF, but somehow I was a new track.

Now, there is an irony in my effort to honor relatedness. With my personal family, father, mother, wife, and children, I was totally at sea in the area of reciprocity and respectful relationship. For a time, in Mississippi, it all fit together. But, the most I figured out my role as organizer, I (again) lost perspective as husband/father. What became shaky white on my own, freelancing in Mississippi, became shattered in the excitement of the years in Texas with the IAF. The IAF became a new toy, and Texas-wide travel to from a new “network” became a cause again. There is a Texas network, and it exists in a very small part because it was built at the expense of the Drake network.

Today I organize, I must organize, because I want integrity both for my family network and for the world in which I live. Objectively, the lessons of the IAF tell me that I organize because relatedness in public life, the very survival of our society, and the world's future depends on my being successful. The symbiosis of family to neighborhood,

neighborhood to city, city to state, state to nation, and nation to world, relies on me....us as organizers.

Subjectively, I organize because my own mother, sisters, brothers, children, have no hope of inheriting a good world unless I/we succeed.

But, now I organize with a determination that what I build will never again become my "causa". When it consumes me, I consume my family. And so, for the rest of my organizing career, I want to organize in order to integrate. Integration of the public and the private becomes my new "causa". If any particular issue or institution, IAF included, demands more than the private can sacrifice, then it is no longer organizing. Why do I organize? For Jim, Matt, Tom, Christopher, Mali, Katie and Adrian.