

# LEGACY

## Richard Wooley

Presented to the Cleveland Philosophical Club April 12, 2011

Alan Alda wrote a book I keep next to my bed, "Things I Overheard While Talking to Myself." I read and reread it because it helps provide me with the chutzpah I require to address our august gathering of well-traveled scholars, readers and highly capable, educated members.

His narrative allows him a vehicle in which to draw from many speeches he'd given in which he, like me, questioned his qualifications to address scientific audiences, historians, physicians and as guest speaker at college commencement. He is, after all, an actor...and I, after all, am merely a musician.

Alda concludes, as do I, that just perhaps there may be value to bringing experiences, ideas, comments and insights from a more subjective and personal point of view.

Thus, then, it is my self-appointed, ongoing role in our club, one that keeps me coming. Along with the occasional truly illuminating and controversial papers presented, the shared salads with my dear departed salad-mate, Sigrid Miller, and the in spite of the intractable predictability of my erstwhile doom-and-gloom comrades.

Thus emboldened let's hope I have some expanded and perhaps even interesting things to say about my subject, "Legacy."

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"Pay It Forward " was a year 2000 smarmy movie based on an interesting sociological premise. The gist was to describe the concept of asking that a good turn be repaid by having it, in some form, passed on to others.

In sociology, this concept is called "*generalized reciprocity*" or "*generalized exchange*". A related transaction, which starts with a gift instead of a loan, is *alternative giving*.

The concept was used as a key plot element in the denouement of a *New Comedy* by Menander, *Dyskolos* a prizewinning play in ancient Athens in 317 BC.

The hypothesis was rediscovered and described by Benjamin Franklin, in a letter to Benjamin Webb dated April 22, 1784: "I do not pretend to *give* such a Sum; I only *lend* it to you. When you meet with another honest Man in similar Distress, you must pay me by lending this Sum to him, enjoining him to discharge the Debt by a like operation, when he shall be able, and shall meet with another opportunity. I hope it may thus go thro' many hands, before it meets with a Knave that will stop its Progress. This is a trick of mine for doing a deal of good with a little money."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his 1841 essay *Compensation*, wrote: "In the order of nature we cannot render benefits to those from whom we receive them, or only seldom. But the benefit we receive must be rendered again, line for line, deed for deed, cent for cent, to somebody."

In 1916, Lily Hardy Hammond wrote, "You don't pay love back; you pay it forward."

The 1929 novel, *Magnificent Obsession*, by Lloyd C. Douglass, also espoused this philosophy, in combination with the concept that good deeds should be performed in confidence.

An anonymous spokesman for Alcoholics Anonymous said in the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1944, "You can't pay anyone back for what has happened to you, so you try to find someone you can pay forward."

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The accepted definition of *Legacy*: *an amount of money or property left to someone in a will. a thing handed down by a predecessor.*

Though I may be guilty of stretching the concept of legacy to include some of those whose intentions were perhaps merely ambition, greed or the need to be creative but they each gave all of us, intended or otherwise, some enormously valuable gifts. Here are a few highly visible practitioners:

*Andrew Carnegie* donated most of his money to establish many libraries, schools, and universities; Carnegie Hall, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Institution of Washington, [Carnegie Mellon University](#) and the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh

*John Llewellyn Lewis* was president of the United Mine Workers of America (UMW), a major player in the history of coal mining. The driving force behind the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which established the United Steel Workers of America and helped organize millions of other industrial workers in the 1930s. His legacy was that he paved the way for both labor and eventually professionals to gather together to obtain their more reasonable share of the American dream.

*John Davison Rockefeller I* revolutionized the petroleum industry, founded the Standard Oil Company, and became the world's richest man. Rockefeller spent the last 40 years of his life in retirement. His fortune was mainly used to create the modern systematic approach of targeted philanthropy with foundations that had a major effect on medicine, education, and scientific research. His foundations pioneered the development of medical research, and were instrumental in the eradication of hookworm and yellow fever.

The great inventions of the Wright brothers included

- (1) *Wing warping* which provided lateral control and allowed them to turn the aircraft to the left or the right.
- (2) *The forward canard* to control the up and down movement or pitch.
- (3) *Wind tunnel tests of their airfoil sections*, which have been used to date in all aeronautical designing and testing.
- (4) *The movable rear rudder* enabling the operator to counteract adverse yaw.
- (5) *An Efficient Propeller* resulted in the development of aircraft propellers having 66 percent efficiency, which had not been attained by any other inventor.

Our bottom line debt to the Wrights is modern air travel.

*Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower* was a five-star general in the United States Army and the 34th President of the United States. During World War II, he served as Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Europe. As President, Eisenhower concluded negotiations with China to end the Korean War and maintained pressure on the Soviet Union during the Cold War. He enlarged the scope of Social Security, and signed the *Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956*.

From the start on June 29, 1956, the Eisenhower Interstate System has been known as the Greatest Public Works Project in History, a magnificent contribution to travel throughout the United States

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These and hundreds more individuals in all fields, either through developing their immediate interests or through sharing the fruit of their success with philanthropy, intentionally or unintentionally, paid forward huge advances in how we live and prosper materially and socially. We are all their beneficiaries. They, knowingly, willingly or otherwise “Paid It Forward.”

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Which brings me, finally, to the point of this little essay: that we all have the ongoing option, perhaps an obligation to *pay forward* if and when we choose.

With myself as an example and as a personal matter, there is likely little chance there will be a Wooley Foundation or Wooley Cancer Center or other imposing edifices or beneficent causes.

I do, however, believe that all of us can try to *pay forward* some good cheer, gestures, ideas or simply a positive presence to our existing fellow humans and to future ones. For some this is appears to be an easy task. They seem to be almost inherently imbued with an obvious positive and friendly attitude and an intuitive willingness to share their generosity and positive presence, tangibly or otherwise; their *niceness*.

My wife, Nora, is one such. I often say she has, quite naturally, more generous, charitable and helpful thoughts and actions by 9:00AM on Mondays than I’ll have the whole week...and I will be trying hard to learn to be nice!

Which raises the main issue for many of us. Is there a means by which those of us without these natural gifts can somehow develop them and change the way we see and interact with others? Can we overcome and change deeply ingrained attitudes and habits?

In my case my enforced membership put me squarely in the midst of one of the all-too-rare programs that is what I call *organized altruism*, a *spiritual training course* called *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

The net result of my twenty-five years as an AA member is that I have managed to remain sober, in itself a remarkable feat, but I have been fortunate enough to have made some changes in that part of my personality that is generally regarded as intuitive and subconscious...a matter of changing how I respond to others and behave in a way that is socially quite the opposite of my pre-AA experience.

Let me assure you; all the old verities are true. Things like “Teaching an old dog new tricks is hard,” and the enforced and honest introspection required by several AA steps is often daunting.

The consequence has been, however, that, as an example, I usually read the name tags of waitresses and checkout clerks and talk to them using their names, and I try to be pleasant realizing that theirs is a largely thankless effort that includes dealing with many customers’ grumpiness. I also try to smile and be cheerful far more than I ever did before...though this often takes some active self-prodding.

This action on my part is basically selfish or self-caring in that when I present this “*goody-two-shoes*” attitude to others it is rather often reciprocated and makes for a pleasant exchange that, in my way of seeing things, is a small but significant “*pay-it-forward*” gesture...and it makes me feel better.

Which brings me to the final point I’d like to make.

We have in this club a number of brilliant, well-educated and wise members who, to my way of thinking, might benefit from trying to observe a measure of the “*pay-it-forward*” concept. Rather than a continuing “gloom-and-doom” recitation of all that we see as terrible in the world we might benefit from trying to learn to share our wealth of knowledge with others.

Alda explained this to me and I’ll share now. He gave a commencement address to graduates at Caltech built largely on his experience in studying and acting in a play he developed about *Richard Feinman*, an exceptional scientist, thinker and teacher who, among other accomplishments, worked on the atomic bomb.

*Quote: I’m assuming you are here at Caltech because you love science, and I’m assuming you’ve learned a great deal here about how to do science. I’m asking today to devote some significant part of your life to figuring out how to share your love of science with the rest of us.*

*And while you’re explaining it, remember that dazzling us with jargon might make us sit in awe of your work, but it won’t make us love it.*

*Tell us frankly how you got there. If you got there by many twists and turns and blind alleys, don’t leave that out. We love a detective story. If you enjoyed the adventure of getting there, so will we.*

*Most scientists do leave that out. By the time we hear about their great discoveries, a lot of the doubt is gone. The mistakes and wrong turns are left out...and it doesn’t sound like a human thing that they’ve done. It separates us from the process.*

*Whatever you do, help us love science the way you do,”*

My message put simply: there are many difficult issues that confront us. We should try to find ways to reach out, even in seemingly insignificant one-to-one encounters, to clearly spell out our observations and ideas about *solutions*.

The consequence, intended or otherwise, is that if we spell out our views in a reasonable and even positive manner this just might set in motion actions that just might provide some movement by others toward solutions. Some one and some ideas had to have been in part manifest in prodding Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and those other brilliant minds.

My “*pay-it-forward*” thing is certainly not scientific but rather that I have tried at times to use my talents to entertain people and perhaps “*sell*” them on a slightly different way of looking at life’s issues.

These are the lyrics to a song I wrote for a part of a San Diego Sea World’s exhibit that was dedicated to an awareness of our obligation to the world’s ecology and environments.

This is Our World  
Lyrics

First verse:

I can hear a sound a-growin’ getting’ stronger ev’ry day,  
It’s a song that’s worth the knowin’, though it’s simple and it’s plain,  
It’s a message from Old Mother Earth we need to understand,  
She’s served us well but now she’s hurtin’ and needs our helpin’ hand.

Chorus:

This...this is our world, this is our home, the place we share...  
And this...this precious earth, it’s all we have...a place worth caring for...  
Now...now is the time, this is the place, where we begin...it’s up to  
Us...we must all join together, with the power of love and care we’re gon-na’ win...

Second verse:

Our children’s’ children all deserve the best that we can leave...  
A land and water we’ve preserved and an air that’s sweet to breathe...  
It’s a call for life we can’t ignore and a duty plain to see...  
It’s a cause that’s worth the fighting for with goals we can achieve...

Chorus:

Third verse:

There’s so much we can do together, it’s up to you and me...  
Workin’ hard to make things better, for the land and air and sea...  
Joinin’ hearts and minds and hands to build a world that’s clean and pure...  
And a future we are sure of, safe and secure...

Chorus: 2 times.....

There is, of course, a huge chunk of *Don Quixote* in all this...but this quest has given me a new and much more rewarding way to find acceptance, personal worth and an amazing amount of happiness. I would wish this for you, my colleagues.

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A paper presented to the Cleveland Philosophical Club April 12, 2011.

Dick Wooley

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dick Wooley". The signature is written in black ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.