



Poor People's United Fund

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Boston's Spare Change Community

Summer 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The year 2020 was not only the year of the pandemic it was also PPUF's 40th anniversary! Forty years of banging our heads against various brick walls so the needs of poor and homeless people would not be continuously at the bottom of the state's to do list. With you as our companions in that activity those walls now have some spindly cracks.

Aware that it has been ten years since Kip passed away, I found myself looking through photos and I could not resist using this photo of Kip and Alice. Kip took on the care of Alice who had been institutionalized as a teenager, then discharged in middle-age during the trendy deinstitutionalization. Luckily Alice found Rosie's Place. In this photo I am sure Alice is trying to convince Kip to do something for her.



In 2020, we were able to celebrate the first woman and the first woman of color Vice President of the United States. Yes! But on January 6th the images that came to us on television made it look like the January 20th inauguration might never happen. But it did. What a feeling of relief! What a feeling not to wake up each morning with your heart pounding, wondering what frightening narrative would fill the airwaves that day.

Many of the former President's comments reminded me of my early years in a world emerging from WWII. Even as a child I would say to myself, "How did those awful hateful things happen? How did that cruel man take over his country? Annihilate millions of people? How did so many ordinary German citizens decide to go along with the Nazis, such an obviously hateful group of people?"

Today, I say to myself, Ohhhhh ...I see. This is how that happened. Mis-information is powerful. If enough people stop reading, evaluating, thinking, their minds and hearts are fair game for those whose focus is power and control.

We face numerous challenges going forward. But I still believe that we can move our delicate democracy to a better

place. The pandemic gave us time to think. The George Floyd murder gave us plenty to think about. There are many young Black, Asian, and white activists who are exerting anti-racist leadership and pushing for reform and not just police reform. Racism runs deep in our culture. Recognizing it - owning up to it will give us the energy to root it out. I want to share with you that nearly a year ago my PPUF colleague and friend, Georgia, had a stroke. As you can imagine it was a terrifying time for Georgia and her family and for PPUF. Given the Covid rules hospital visitation was limited to one family member. But they were grateful for even that much. Since leaving the hospital Georgia's family and friends have offered love and encouragement. Happily, Georgia is healing well. She is gaining strength and the lion's share of her faculties have returned. Yay! She has had to step back a bit from her PPUF work but does what she can when she can. Love you, Georgia.

Lastly, as you are aware, lots of people are still struggling to find what they need to survive. Food and housing being at the top of the list. PPUF continues to provide about 200 food gift certificates per month to individuals and organizations. Housing was an issue before the pandemic. Officials in many parts of the country placed a moratorium on evictions during the pandemic, yet people still found themselves being evicted. PPUF helped secure storage space for furniture etc while people searched for new housing. Some cruelties never stop.

And even if you have a place to live you can't always afford to pay for the things that you need like electricity and heat. Throughout the pandemic and continuing today, PPUF has been helping families with utilities, rent and security deposits.

I read recently the US's richest 25 citizens barely paid any taxes. At the same time the number of individuals experiencing homelessness has more than doubled since 1990. Some things never change.

But I can tell you first hand that there are good people everywhere! In the depth of the pandemic I was in a supermarket getting a few items. Another older woman in line ahead of me had just paid for her items. She hesitated, looked at my loaf of bread and eggs and said very gently, "If you need help paying for that, I can pay." I assured her that I was ok. She went on to say that she knows that many people, especially older folks, are having a hard time. And she can't just do nothing. WOW. The kindness of a stranger.

Lots to do. With your help we will continue to help people who reach out to us for help. Thank you for the many kindnesses you do each day.

In Struggle and Hope,
Fran, Georgia, & Margaret

As Kippy said to you in a 1990 letter, "Can you help us today? Because today is the only day we have really. Tomorrow is for those who can see their way clearly to it. And while our faith remains strong as ever, our check book gets queazy. Anything you send will be greatly appreciated."

Phone Calls

The past year has been very tough for poor people. We are receiving more calls from people desperate for food (twice as many calls as before the pandemic.)



In addition, we are receiving more calls for help with rent and other bills. In a typical case, a single parent is furloughed from her job, is waiting to get unemployment or does not qualify for it, and so can longer pay her rent. Although landlords were prohibited by law from evicting tenants at least through last Dec. 31, and the CDC has recommended no evictions until June 30, 2021, many landlords have put pressure on tenants to pay or served them with eviction notices. Tenants know that they will have to pay the back rent eventually, though many will not have funds to do so. And by paying even some of what is owed in rent, families end up with nothing left for food. We try to help out when we can. We also refer families to other agencies and alert them to food resources.



The second relief bill certainly has helped with this crisis, but it has not been enough to cope with over a year of lost wages. We worry about what will happen to many of these families if our country does not forgive back rent and increase food supplements. Our country will be faced with an even larger problem of hunger and homelessness than at present. We are still hopeful, however, that at least in Massachusetts, solutions can be found to enable poor people to remain in their homes and have enough to eat.

Look At Housing in Massachusetts- not surprising but sobering

The National Low Income Housing Coalition has shown how low wages and high rents lock renters out in Massachusetts and all across the country. For 2020, the Massachusetts statewide housing wage is \$35.52/hour, meaning that a worker would have to earn that amount per hour in order to afford the fair market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment (\$1,847/month), without having to pay more than 30% of their income toward rent. The housing wage is based on a worker working 40 hours/week, 52 weeks/year. The housing wage has been steadily increasing in Massachusetts. For 2019, it was \$33.81; for 2018, it was \$28.64; for 2017, it was \$27.39; for 2016, it was \$25.91; and for 2015, it was \$24.64/hour.

Massachusetts ranks as the **3rd least affordable area** in the country in the Out of Reach 2020 report, when looking at the 50 states and Washington, D.C., behind only Hawaii and California.

Kip Quotes

This July marks 10 years since we've heard Kip tell it like it is. So here are a few reminders...

We believe that it is necessary to match a politics to a theology that demands that we stand with the poor and fight at their side. It is not enough for a ministry to mouth pious proclamations about the poor. It is not enough to pray or have vigils and seminars. That merely reiterates the statistical lies of horror. One must be with them and help them fight their fight. Ita Ford, one of the four missionaries slain in El Salvador, said it this way: "Can I let myself be evangelized by this opportunity?" We must consistently provide the resources that will ultimately empower the powerless. We must, in short put our money where our ministry is--- in the hands of community groups that work with the poor. (1998/99)



We as Christians have to disapprove the slogans of the society. The first of which says happiness consists in having, getting, being rich, standing in the limelight and dominating others. In this way, we will initiate what Jesus did with the people of his times. He came to them to offer a solution to the injustices... It is not enough to say what he said, We must do what he did. That doesn't mean we have to be crucified. It only means that we must stand up to be counted. (Regis College, 1994)

In the 80s , we all began to hear a new phrase- **compassion fatigue**. After 10 years of caring for the homeless and hungry, we became tired of looking at the poor in the streets and we began distancing ourselves from them, but still allowed ourselves the luxury of calling ourselves compassionate. And so, compassion moved from the liberal lexicon, to forgiving ourselves by call it fatigue. Of course, we hadn't changed anything. We simply re-arranged the deck chairs on the Titanic. Compassion, my friends, is not a simpering slogan or a lachrymose litany of smiley faces. It is, I suggest a discipline- one that demands action based on the idea of suffering together. ... So when we talk about compassion we must remember it is about the struggle to remain human.





STRIVING FOR JUSTICE

Facing a challenging economy and enormous budget cuts in the early 80s a group of non-profits met in a room at UMASS to find a way to keep organizations that were doing social justice work up and running. No one had any idea what would come of the discussions. We went around and around but we could not come up with an idea beyond cake sales and car washes which we knew would not sustain the work that lay ahead.

After months of discussions, I saw an article in the NY Times about a group called The Women's Way who broke from United Way and began to set up payroll deduction giving programs in competition with UW. I called them up and asked them how it was going? They replied, "GREAT!" We then asked if there was someone who would come to Boston to show us how to do the same thing here.

A team leader from the Committee on Responsive Philanthropy came to help. Within a couple of weeks we decided to replicate the Women's Way's fundraising strategy of raising money through workplace payroll deduction. At first, the name we came up with was The Progressive Way. Later it changed to Community Works!

Official documents were filed. A board formed. Committees formed. All we needed was companies willing to allow us to ask their employees for donations. Most companies were reluctant to allow it as they thought UW would not like it. But two places Harvard University and the Combined Federal campaign had what they called 'open campaigns'. We applied to and were accepted by both. The first season netted about \$13,000. In those days that was a good amount of money that was shared among 12 member organizations.



A sampling of CW membership over the 40 years

After nearly 40 years Community Works board/membership has decided it's time to say goodbye to its payroll deduction fundraising effort. Community Works will be closing its doors as of July 31, 2021. Our heads are held high. We are proud of the networks we helped to build, and the myriad of social justice efforts throughout Boston and the Commonwealth that were supported.

Thanks, Community Works. You Rocked!

In subsequent years CW grew to 32 members and over 50 workplace campaigns and raised hundreds of thousands dollars in contributions. In the late 90s, the world began to change. fewer businesses were locally owned. A new thing called the internet started to have an impact on the way people gave to charity.

Both of these caused a decline in workplace giving. In addition, CW found it difficult to attract foundation support. We were not able to illustrate sufficiently how CW's structure -that is, member owned- was core to being different from the United Way. Undaunted CW continued to raise money for social justice. But it just got harder and harder. The pandemic didn't help!



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Finally Out of the House? Visit the Kip Tiernan Memorial This Summer



Find it on Dartmouth Street between Boylston and Newbury Streets.
At the *Copley* Green Line Station.