

(Text from Chef Toms keynote for the San Juan Island Community Foundation Annual Breakfast of Champions)

Today I have chosen 5 key words that I believe speak to why we are all here today.

Philanthropist

Origin:

Late Latin *philanthropia*, from Greek *philanthrōpia*, from *philanthrōpos* loving people, from *phil-* + *anthrōpos* human being

Date: circa 1623

1: goodwill to fellowmen ; *especially* : active effort to promote human welfare

Culture

Origin:

Middle English, cultivated land, cultivation, from Anglo-French, from Latin *cultura*, from *cultus*

Date: 15th century

1: [CULTIVATION](#) , [TILLAGE](#)2: the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties especially by education; the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations ; the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization

Community

Origin:

Middle English *comunete*, from Anglo-French *communité*, from Latin *communitat-*, *communitas*, from *communis*

Date: 14th century

1: a unified body of individuals

Intention

Date: 14th century

1: a determination to act in a certain way : [RESOLVE](#)2: [IMPORT](#) , [SIGNIFICANCE](#)

Contribute

Origin:

Latin *contributus*, from *com-* + *tribuere* to grant

Date: 1530

to play a significant part in bringing about an end or result

When I was 10 years old my cousins and I decided to go Christmas caroling door to door to raise money for families in need. Not knowing what to do with the two cans of coins we collected, we turned them over to the local paper which in turn wrote a story along with a picture. That in turn caused others to give that year as well and the annual Christmas fund drive was born. Those two cans of coins in and of themselves did little to alleviate the financial hardships of families in need but it was the generosity of others who were moved by a simple act of kindness that made a difference. The bank where my grandfather did business cut the article out and laminated it as a gift to my grandparents, which my grandfather proudly displayed for years. It was something that he routinely mentioned when talking to us about our responsibilities as members of a community.

It is our capacity for giving that completes us as human beings and I have never heard of anyone who said with their dying breath that they wished they had been more stingy in life. In a world that has become increasingly focused on the “me” at the expense of the collective “we”, human beings may have reached one of the most defining moments in our existence.

Over the years I have had the good fortune to meet many extraordinary individuals under unique sets of circumstances, many of which involved working together to address a specific need. From hunger and homelessness to education and healthcare; from poverty and sickness to natural and / or man made disasters I have witnessed over and over again the human capacity for compassion and generosity even in the face of adversity. It may well be that this capacity is what separates us from other species and aligns us with our purpose and gives meaning to our existence.

It would also seem that our capacity for giving has been sorely tested over the past two decades as we witness greater and greater cataclysmic events around the planet and yet in every instance we seem to somehow muster the will to reach out to others even in small ways. AND it appears by all accounts that there will be ample opportunity to continue testing our capacities in the giving arena.

Giving by definition means to make a present; to convey to another; to designate a share or a portion; to carry out; to offer as appropriate or due especially to something higher or more worthy. It originates in the 13th century and just to show that I appreciate the diversity of influence on philanthropy its origin is neither Latin or Greek but Skandinavian akin to an Old Swedish designation of *giva* to give.

We may well have reached a pentacle moment of human existence where the only real solutions rely on our capacity to give rather than our propensity to take. Future generations may well judge us for the actions we undertake or maybe even more importantly the actions we refuse to undertake in the next ten years. That story is yet to be told and it is my greatest hope that they will be able to say that in a moment of historic definition we decided to uphold the principles of human compassion and act on behalf of the common good.

This brings me to the topic of salmon; an odd segue I will admit but it is a species that has always intrigued me because their entire existence is based on the concept of hope. The hope that someday they will return to their place of origin and be given the opportunity to make the ultimate sacrifice in order to insure that the next generation will survive.

As with the complex ecosystem that drives the salmon run, so is the complexity of the new philanthropy. This idea of the new philanthropy relies less on throwing money at a problem and more on investing resources as a way to leverage a real solution. It requires a new level of participation, collaboration and organization that is designed to elevate all levels of community life and to bring about effective change that directly impacts a human condition. It requires a new level of sophistication such as planned giving and fresh infrastructure for empowering our unique ability to innovate, adapt and manifest real and lasting changes.

Each of us in this room is here today because we are contributors and each of us is a stakeholder in the future. Every valued recipient represents an investment in that future. More and more it is glocal solutions that will make a difference. Local actions that address global issues, have real impact in our immediate capacity to live a meaningful life and provide a legacy of giving that I hope we can all celebrate for years to come. To each of the recipient organizations I can say to you as one who knows that beyond the financial contributions and investment that the Foundation will bestow on you today; it is more importantly a validation of your work and your commitment to improve the human condition in your immediate community. And it is the actions of you and us and the many more like us that will demonstrate our capacity to make a difference in the world.