

Why do you do what you do?



A commemorative chapbook
to celebrate LA's passionate leaders
and to mark the 50th anniversary
of the Durfee Foundation



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This chapbook was published to celebrate LA's passionate leaders and to mark the 50th anniversary of the Durfee Foundation. It was distributed at a retreat for LA leaders in October 2010 and also was distributed to colleagues across the country.

PLEASE NOTE:

Organizational affiliations included here are accurate for the time the quotation was given and may not be current today.



INTRODUCTION

This chapbook is tribute to magnificent people who set out to change the world—and actually do.

It is thanks for their wisdom, vision, tenacity, ingenuity, and limitless generosity.

It is an invitation to others—hopeful, tentative, aspiring—who are standing in the wings.

And it is a love song to Los Angeles.

Published on the occasion of the Durfee Foundation's 50th anniversary, this collection of quotes from Los Angeles leaders is excerpted from applications made over the past several years to Durfee fellowship programs. What you hold in your hands is only a sampling of an astonishing array of testimony leaders have shared with us and with each other.

We ask leaders, "Why do you do what you do?" *What* they do is usually quite easy to understand. *Why* they do it is often less immediately apparent, and their answers, so often, are disarming.

We ask them, “What have you learned along the way?”
Their answers sing a whole chorus of melodies.
It is people, at the end of the day, who make change. Yes,
it takes money and strategy, buildings, infrastructure, and
political will. But it is leaders who take up a cause and
stoke an ember into a blaze. We are committed to those
who tend the flame.

The Durfee Foundation is dedicated to the idea that individuals fuel the nonprofit sector. We believe they are our most valuable resource and that it is in our collective best interest that they be nurtured and sustained.

The voices you read here might be heard anywhere, but they are here and they are ours. Together we call Los Angeles—this sprawling, complicated place—home.

Because they are here, we are hopeful for our future.

CARRIE AVERY and CLAIRE PEEPS

In 1979, I was part of a group that founded a new organization called the Little Tokyo Service Center, and I was hired to be the first Executive Director. It was the job of my dreams and I ignored the fact that the organization had no other staff, no secure funding, and no track record because I was excited to be working in the community.

I have learned that if we ask for help, people will respond.

BILL WATANABE

Little Tokyo Service Center

I do this work not only because it is interesting and challenging and meaningful every day but because when I was 13 years old I accompanied my mother to the police station to get a restraining order against her husband—my stepfather—who had beaten her. I have learned first hand that violence doesn't happen just to other people or to other families—it happens to our own!

I've learned that I can't do it all and that I can't do it alone. I've learned that I am not always as patient as I should be, but that impatience is not necessarily bad. I've learned that when I don't take care of myself, not only does my back go out and I can't walk, but people who depend on me can't. I've learned that laughter is indeed the best medicine for everything. I love to laugh and making people laugh is one of my greatest pleasures. Once I got a fortune in a fortune cookie that said, "when you tell people the truth, make them laugh or they will kill you." I believe this to be true!

PATTI GIGGANS
Peace Over Violence

It is a vital part of the Son Jarocho tradition to teach, to share, to pass on to future generations of *jaraneros* and to other musicians the music, the dance, the verses, the culture, and the Fandango. This is how music has been kept alive for over 400 years. Musicians, dancers, children, adults, and elders participate in sharing, expressing themselves, in showing off what they've learned, or just listening and watching. It is a celebration of who we are, where we came from, and what we are holding onto by passing it down.

CESAR CASTRO
Son Jarocho Guitarist

I have chosen to cast my lot in this community, for it is where I have found my passion and joy, as well as the very face of God, in the struggle of the poor.

I have learned a great deal in these many years working with gangs. I see now how the violence which grips us still is more symptom than problem....Above all, I have seen that the day won't ever come when I have more courage, honor, and proximity to God than these young men and women I've been privileged to know.

FATHER GREGORY BOYLE
Homeboy Industries

My work came about in East Los Angeles during the school walkouts at the tail end of the Civil Rights, Chicano, and Black Power movements. I realized that I was privileged to be the first one in my family to have graduated from high school.

RAUL AÑORVE
IDEPSCA

I've been doing this work since 1970. It began when I was fifteen years old. This is my calling. When I began the work, I experienced very early that I could make a real difference in the world—at that time, bringing new life to a dying forest. The feeling was so real that I wanted—and chose—to continue doing work that did make a difference. This led to the founding of TreePeople in 1973 and I have been working full time ever since.

I've learned enough lessons to write several books and conduct seminars on service, community action, and communications. At the same time, I've also come to realize that there are many more lessons I have yet to learn—and I look forward to this for the rest of my life.

ANDY LIPKIS
TreePeople

As a former prisoner, I have personally experienced the sense of fear and hopelessness in being homeless upon being released from prison. I have also experienced the vicious cycle of addiction-violence-incarceration and know firsthand how difficult it is to break free of this cycle, especially without getting help or support.

I have learned that there is always more to do, so pace yourself to prevent burnout. You can't do everything yourself and can't be everything to everyone. Change happens over time. Be patient and don't forget in the meantime that we all have a part to play.

SUSAN BURTON
A New Way of Life

I choose to do this work in Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles because I want my work to impact the lives of families in the community where I was born and raised. I grew up in a two-bedroom bungalow in East LA that my parents bought in 1965. There was no private space in the house. The bedroom that I shared with my brother and sister was more like a hallway than a private bedroom. My parents would have to walk through our room to get to their bedroom and everyone would have to walk through our room to get to the bathroom. The kitchen table was the only decent place to do homework. We had no choice but to concentrate above the noise emanating from pots and pans being washed and *novelas* blaring from the television nearby.

As a child, I had no idea that my living situation could be different, I only knew that this was my home and it felt safe. As modest and lacking in privacy as it was, our little house on Folsom Street provided me with a stability that many of my peers did not have.

MARIA CABILDO
East LA Community Corporation

My passion for the arts was the heart of my involvement, as a *teatrlista*, artist, writer, and street poet. Lessons learned include the most resonant discovery after a lifetime of creating—the best is yet to come!!

TOMAS BENITEZ
Self Help Graphics

When my daughter, Emily, was ten years old, she wrote me a poem on notebook paper bordered with her hand-drawn happy faces alternating with sad faces. It read:

I lived wondering why you were never there.
But now I know why.
It was because you were working hard.
Then I understood that I was nothing to compete
with your work,
and in your world of letters and numbers
I was invisible.

DEBORAH CHING
Chinatown Service Center

What began as a simple short-term internship assignment has turned into an almost 14-year love affair with this neighborhood and the young people and families who live here. I have learned a great deal about life and myself from people who have been largely written off by our society because they are poor. Through their example, I have learned what it means to be a good neighbor, to share with others, and to respect and value diversity of cultures and lifestyles.

JEFF CARR

Bresee Foundation

I make art because I really know it has the power to save
us from ourselves.

KAMAU DAAOOD
Poet

My father was a minister. My mother was an elementary school teacher. I was raised with the idea that service to the community was a worthwhile and important goal.

Since I was young—when my grandmother and grandfather drove me in their pickup truck over the backroads in Northern California, seeing old covered bridges, historic towns, and rustic farms, and sharing stories of when they first came to the state—I have treasured the built environment and the role it plays in conveying personal and community memories. I learned early in my life that by preserving historic places, we preserve our memories and culture.

LINDA DISHMAN
Los Angeles Conservancy

I'm one of those '60s babies. I was directly involved in non-violent marches for social justice, student sit-ins, and the Poor People's Movement. My core values and purpose remain solidly focused on community empowerment as embodied in those experiences.

What have I learned along the way? People have capacity. A little knowledge and support can make a difference in the life of families and communities. People and place matter. Race and culture will either be the Achilles Heel or the Healing Soul of our communities.

DENISE FAIRCHILD

Community Design Technology Center

I have learned that we all need a time and place in which to address our inner lives, to escape from the congestion of the city, to hear ourselves think and be able to feel in a different way, to connect to forces greater than ourselves. I believe strongly in the transformational power of wilderness and open space. As our lives become increasingly complex and our cities increasingly crowded, people need breathing room more than ever before.

ESTHER FELDMAN

Community Conservation Solutions

Winston Churchill once wrote, “men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened.” Poetry is a medium for that truth. Poetry creates a distilled space for us to explore the truth of our everyday lives, a place to be open and vulnerable, and a place for others to connect with us. I make art not only to connect with myself, but to connect with others.

RUTH FORMAN

Poet

Contrary to popular rhetoric, I believe we have the resources to feed the hungry, educate all our children, and support our families through healthy communities. I have dedicated my life to helping demonstrate this reality.

I have learned that the journey is often more important than the destination. I have learned that the challenges that life presents are the context in which we define ourselves and build integrity. I have learned that every person I meet contributes to our understanding of life and that I need to slow down, be present, and listen.

LARK GALLOWAY GILLIAM
Community Health Councils

Today's evolving technology and media arts can, at last, build a bridge of communication between social, political, philosophical, and aesthetic movements. Feminism, multiculturalism, gay and lesbian identity issues, third world demands for democracy, civil rights, the internet, and postmodernism no longer need to be seen as isolated phenomena. Media arts have the power and the responsibility of a global town square where commonality and variety meet to negotiate differences and celebrate creativity.

I have learned that ideas, lifestyles, aesthetics, and even politics that differ from mine are those that I most often explore and value. Difference, to me, is a prerequisite for positive change in society.

ANNE BRAY

Freewaves

For twenty-five years I have worked beside poor people who organize their neighbors and co-workers to fight for decent housing, jobs, and a better life. I have seen them light up a room with their intelligence and vision, and then go back to jobs where they push a broom or wait tables and are made invisible by middle class people who pass them by. It is hard to stand idly by when society's inequalities are so clearly visible.

GILDA HAAS
Strategic Actions for a Just Economy

I have learned that what my Grandmother used to say is absolutely true. If you have “bit off” more than you can chew, keep chewing, it’ll go down!

FORESCEE HOGAN-ROWLES

Community Financial Resource Center

On the Bullet train 12:57:24 I arrive at the Kyoto station on time. On my left stands an 8th century, 5-story Buddhist pagoda and, on my right, a cab with an automatic door and a 5-inch Sony TV on the dashboard awaits my entry.

I arrive at my family's 800-year-old home where my father greets me from his gravel garden. He points to the upper corner of the eaves of the house. There I see the spider that I have known from my childhood. My great-grandfather had once told me that this spider is one of the generations of spiders that go back to the 15th century. We know this because we have a poem about a spider written by our 15th century ancestor.

HIROKAZU KOSAKA

Buddhist Priest and Master Calligrapher

I began my involvement in community-based service and volunteerism during my experiences as an undergraduate at UCLA when I participated in the Pilipino American student organization Samahang Pilipino. That period of student activism has proved to be the most important and defining period of my life.

JOEL JACINTO

Search to Involve Pilipino Americans

My family has always had a social conscience. My parents campaigned for Eugene McCarthy and marched against the Vietnam War and for equal housing and civil rights. We had family discussions at the dinner table nightly.

I believe in a society in which health care is a right, just as education, quality child care, and other services should be, in a society in which people work for the advantage or benefit of everyone to achieve a “common good.” My work is my way of bringing about that society. I work in public health so that the health of communities and the people in them receive greater attention than they do now.

LYNN KERSEY

Maternal and Child Health Access

I didn't come to the work. The work came to me, and my life has been blessed because of it. At Mothers' Club, I saw the challenges facing our families and their great and earnest desire to make good lives for themselves and their children, and I had no choice but to do the very best I could to create and sustain this place that they depended on. It has been fun, and scary, and impossibly rewarding.

I've learned that change is a process that happens over time. Sometimes it seems to lie dormant, then it emerges, then it seems to stop, then it seems that all of a sudden—there it is. This holds true for a child who is learning to be independent, for a mother who is learning English, for an organization that is developing a new program, and for a community that is struggling to create change.

SUE KUJAWA
Mothers' Club

My mother is my role model because she taught me the value of service to others...I am from a community that has a negative reputation, yet I have had the opportunity to travel and to meet dignitaries, public officials, and entertainers. However, all the accolades cannot compare to the personal satisfaction I receive in seeing one of the youth who is a part of this community excel and graduate from school.

SAUNDRA BRYANT
All Peoples Christian Center

After teaching for more than 20 years at a Boyle Heights elementary school, a sabbatical from teaching allowed me to begin tutoring children from four public elementary schools. In 1985, I founded PUENTE Learning Center upon discovering that these youngsters came from households in which their parents or primary caregivers did not speak English and did not have an opportunity themselves for a basic education.

I have learned that the less advantaged segment of our society possesses a wealth of potential, productivity, and community involvement that only education can liberate.

SISTER JENNIE LECHTENBERG
PUENTE Learning Center

My twin sister was murdered by her husband. Her death has altered my life completely and irrevocably. Her husband is in prison and, within hours of her death, I became the guardian of her two small children. Those children and I now live as statistical survivors of violence against women. I now live the life of a single working mother. I now have a son and a daughter for whom the work I do is an imperative, not simply a vision.

ABBY LEIBMAN
California Women's Law Center

At a very young age, while growing up in Hawaii, I realized how powerful art could be as a catalyst for presenting challenging perspectives, creating dialogue, and giving voice to an idea or experience. The lack of visibility of Asian Pacific artists and experiences in the arts and media motivates my work at East West Players.

TIM DANG

East West Players

To whom much is given, much is expected. I was given a great deal, including the opportunity for higher education, medical school, and public health school. I had planned on working in developing countries, and I did for a while, in Kenya and Uganda. Then I was called back home where my mother told me, “You can do international health work here in Los Angeles.” She was right, and I have landed in the most ethnically diverse city of its size in the country.

ELISA NICHOLAS

The Children’s Clinic of Long Beach

It was, frankly, a religious impulse that first motivated me to do this kind of work. Having read Gandhi, I tried to emulate his life in my own special, failing way. I was drawn to his unity of vision—where direct public service, political activism, meditation, and faith were practiced daily. The Catholic Worker community was the closest thing here in Los Angeles, so in December 1981, married and with a nine-month old baby, we took a chance on the heart and joined Catholic Worker, family and all.

You may not be able to win the big stuff, but you can succeed locally.

JONATHAN PARFREY

Physicians for Social Responsibility

I have learned that no matter how disabled a person might be, he or she responds better when treated with dignity and respect than with indifference and coercion. I have learned that institutions and bureaucracies create formidable barriers to client empowerment. I've learned that people of good will can make a difference.

JIM PREIS

Mental Health Advocacy Services

Artists have the capacity to redefine reality, take risks, overstep boundaries, and celebrate in the sheer pleasure of creating something new that I find inspiring and, moreover, that I want to help support and share.

One must remain adaptable, endure a fair amount of risk, and jump when necessary. While there are no certainties ever, my own personal attachment to the profession comes from the sense of freedom and value that is accorded independent thinking and the room given to imagination that affects me daily—qualities and values that are central to the life of all contemporary artists and their creative pursuits.

TOM RHOADS
Santa Monica Museum of Art

My father, a retired social worker, taught me and my three siblings the importance of community service. I saw him work tirelessly with families and children in need. He did so with respect and regarded the opportunity to help others as an honor. His example of recognizing and acknowledging the good and value in others is a lasting and guiding impression.

BRENDA SHOCKLEY
Community Build

Every day I am inspired by the fact that I am working to clean up southern California's coast, and millions of people want and need this resource to be protected and restored.

MARK GOLD
Heal the Bay

I sit in my office around the corner from my childhood home and three blocks away from where I was introduced to the struggles for social justice and equity. It was 1972. My older brothers had left our one-bedroom Pico-Union apartment for college and were introducing into our home their new-found politicization from campus life. Inspired by their sons and frustrated with the conditions at our grammar school, Magnolia Avenue Elementary, my parents joined others and formed Padres Unidos to hold the school district accountable.

They made the courageous decision to boycott the school for a week to protest the overcrowding conditions, the double-session classrooms, and the lack of adequate playground or cafeteria facilities. I joined my mother on a picket line as she pushed my younger brother in his stroller. At the height of the tensions, my parents joined a sit-in at the school, risking arrest. A year later, I participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for the school expansion. So began my commitment to social justice and education.

ARTURO VARGAS

National Association of Latino Elected and
Appointed Officials Educational Fund

I started working on social justice issues a few years after I arrived into the United States from Mexico. For me, my relationship to my work and the community that I work for is like a marriage. I made the commitment a long time ago, and it has been part of my life ever since.

LEONARDO VILCHIS

Union de Vecinos

Almost from the beginning, art and play became a refuge from the chaos of my body and my family, a place of rules, where imagination was safe, where things could be made that couldn't be damaged, where communion was possible with the voices on the page or pictures on the screen.

My father, who never even scolded my sister and me, sharply reprimanded us one Sunday night when, jaded pre-teens that we were, we laughed at the plate twirlers on the Ed Sullivan show. He said, "Never laugh at a person who has worked hard to do something well."

In my early twenties the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York refused to train me solely on the basis of my disability. The academy's argument was that it was a "professional" organization and since I was disabled I would never work professionally as an actress, so it could not accept me.

VICKY LEWIS

Other Voices/Mark Taper Forum

All the arts for all students. I recite the words on a daily basis. But it's the students themselves and my own experience that keep me engaged in this field.

When I faced a class of fourth graders as a visiting dance artist in a rural Maine community 25 years ago, I recognized the power of artistic experience in an educational setting: watching Danielle spin her way out of shyness, and Mark and Randy begin to make artistic choices with a beginning/middle/end dance. And Mrs. Wilson witnessed her students joyfully embracing the learning experience. They were learning about dance concepts—space, time, and force—about creative solutions and physical confidence and, yes, about fractions and verbs.

LAURIE SCHELL

California Alliance for Arts Education

My mother raised six children and at the same time spent years of her life involved in union organizing. Together we organized the first tenant association in our complex.

REV. EUGENE WILLIAMS
Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches

My oldest brother Adam suffers from schizophrenia and has been on and off the streets for the past 35 years. I've been his caretaker, rescuer, and liaison to the rest of the world. When I learned of an organization that was doing theater with mentally ill and homeless clients, I was drawn to the work as a way to have a positive impact on the lives of people like my brother.

JONATHAN ZEICHNER
Inside Out Community Arts

As a world champion kickboxer, I had a long history of working with youth. The work became personal in 1990 when I myself fell victim to gang violence. Sonny, my 16-year old son, was killed in a drive-by shooting. In court, I met the three killers face to face, not for retribution, but to forgive them.

BLINKY RODRIGUEZ
Communities in Schools

Scene at age 22: By day I'm drawing dots with the maestro, by night I'm at a hip hop club, near the turntables, saxophone in hand. After a while, the classical themes creep into the jam session, and the DJ beats seep into the symphony.

The study of music composition has been a great analogy for observing the underlying form in many things, which helps me appreciate the "art" in anything. Music helps me love mathematics, language, logic, debate, astronomy, geometry, football, weightlifting, painting, t'ai chi, literature...

DOUBLE G
Composer/Conductor

I come to the work of immigrant rights as part of my own personal search for justice. I came to the United States as a small child to be reunited with my father and mother, who had come earlier. For many years, our family lived like so many other immigrant families today—without legal immigration status. I fight for immigrant rights because, like my parents, millions of immigrants work for America and sacrifice for their families, and find so little reward in their contribution.

I have learned that nothing is more powerful than seeing a human being recognize and uphold their own value and worth.

ANGELICA SALAS

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles

I write out of a profound sense of gratitude for Los Angeles, a city I see as a place that is large enough—literally and metaphorically—to take all of us in. I think my work counters notions of separation and exclusion, and instead presents examples of our tenacious love for this place, for our neighbors, for our many histories. I write my stories to bring forward the brilliant and delicate existence of humanity in places that have been abandoned as empty, to affirm people's unique identities where systems and structures have denied it, to make permanent the fleeting moments that prove that beauty trumps violence, that there's more hope than not. Some things are just so fragile in how they exert their existence—I'm on their side.

MARJORIE GELLHORN SA'ADAH

Writer

THE DURFEE FOUNDATION

The Durfee Foundation is a family foundation that seeks to adhere to the values of our founders, Dorothy Durfee Avery and R. Stanton Avery, by rewarding individual initiative and leadership. The majority of our grantmaking focuses on the Los Angeles region, where the foundation's history lies and where funding needs are great.

We build partnerships with individuals and institutions that share our ideals of creativity, risk-taking, fiscal care, integrity, entrepreneurial spirit, and continuous learning. We seek to build community in unexpected ways.

We make grants where our dollars will have the greatest impact. We hope that Durfee funds provide leverage for other funding opportunities. Durfee is a patient investor. We are willing to make grants where the outcome may be hard to measure or not measurable for many years.

Above all, Durfee's focus is on extraordinary people who make things happen.

DURFEE FOUNDATION TIMELINE

- 1960** R. Stanton (Stan) Avery and Dorothy Durfee Avery establish the Avery Foundation; the foundation issues its first grant for \$50 to Bradbury-Duarte Community Chest on December 5.
- 1964** Dorothy Durfee Avery passes away.
- 1965-6** Stan and Dorothy's three children, Judy, Dennis, and Russell Avery, join the board.
- 1977** The Avery Foundation is renamed the Durfee Foundation in honor of Dorothy Durfee Avery; the foundation provides operating grants to numerous Los Angeles-based nonprofit organizations.
- 1979** The foundation's first executive director, Robbie Macfarlane, is hired.
- 1980** New grantmaking guidelines are created, including an emphasis on grants to individuals and to efforts unlikely to receive other support.
- 1985** The American/Chinese Adventure Capital program is launched in honor of Stan Avery's connections to China; Durfee runs the program for over 15 years.
- 1986** The first wave of the third generation joins the board: Michael Newkirk and Carrie Avery (Stan and Dorothy's grandchildren) become trustees.
- 1989** Dennis Avery steps down from the board; Durfee's longest standing (and only national) program, the Student Challenge Awards at Earthwatch, is established.
- 1992** The Durfee Community Fund gives out its first grants.
- 1993** Carrie Avery is elected board president.

- 1994** Russell Avery steps down from the board; the board adopts community representation on selection panels of grant programs.
- 1995** Jonathan Newkirk (Stan and Dorothy's grandson) joins the board.
- 1996** Robbie Macfarlane retires; Claire Peeps is named executive director.
- 1996** The board affirms its focus on grantmaking in the Los Angeles region and on efforts that involve individuals and risk-taking.
- 1997** The Sabbatical Awards Program is launched; the Music Fellowship Program begins.
- 1997** Stan Avery passes away at age 90, just a few weeks after attending a Durfee board meeting.
- 1998** Halina Avery (Stan and Dorothy's granddaughter) joins the board.
- 1999** Diana Newkirk McKee (Stan and Dorothy's granddaughter) joins the board; the first ARC Awards are given out; the Durfee Artist Awards program is launched
- 2000** The Gay and Lesbian Fund is launched.
- 2006** The first class of six Stanton Fellows is selected; the Durfee Community Fund is replaced by the Springboard Fund.
- 2007** Diana Newkirk McKee steps down from the board.
- 2009** Judy Avery retires from the board after nearly 50 years of service; trustees are now all third-generation family members.
- 2010** The Durfee Foundation celebrates its 50th Anniversary; Durfee initiates a new Board Fellows program for non-family members; Robin Kramer and Bill Watanabe are welcomed as inaugural Board Fellows.

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