

P R E F A C E

In July 1973, the *Toronto Star*'s Sidney Katz heralded the opening of one of North America's first shelters for battered women with the headline, *The rising wave of runaway wives—Women are liberating themselves: they say to heck with it and leave.*

Nine years later, in 1982, I was hired as a counselor at that shelter.

In an effort to pin the tail on the patriarchal donkey, counselors, whose job descriptions made chief cooks and bottle washers of us all, spoke to journalists and columnists like Sidney Katz. We said yes to television reporters who wanted to come by the shelter for a quick stand-up interview to talk about the causes of violence against women or respond to breaking news like the response to Farrah Fawcett's 1984 film, *The Burning Bed*, the O.J. Simpson trial or news of a previously anonymous man killing his wife.

We buttonholed elected politicians at every opportunity. Armed with statistics, anecdotal evidence and analysis, we did speech after speech, meeting after meeting with social workers, police officers, lawyers, church groups and lawmakers, wanting them to understand and take action on violence against women. We viewed ourselves as advocates.

We knew that providing shelter and support to women fleeing violence without trying to deal with the system that allowed such violence to persist did not make sense.

But we had other worries, worries about money in particular. The shelter was always full. The length of our waiting list was a howling reminder of the services that were needed. We were going to have to become good at something most women would rather eat nails than do. We were going to have to learn how to ask people for money.

The thought was not appealing, but eventually we got our heads around it.

Weren't people who gave us money just an extension of our movement? Not everyone could be on the front line with us, but some could help by writing cheques. And we'd heard that if you mailed a letter to 5,000 people or more, Canada Post would give you a break on the postage. At a time when the term "cheque book activism" was used somewhat derisively to denote people who were not really committed, we embraced it and began to recruit supporters using direct mail. Direct marketing was our ticket and we jumped in with both feet, penning clear and emotional letters to caring people (who showed they were caring because they had given to another charity) telling the stories of the women who came to us for help.

Soon we were measuring our daily mail by the inch. Hundreds, then thousands, of people sent in large numbers of small donations. Far from making us feel beholden, our fundraising tool made us independent and powerful. How democratic!

But eventually eight years of working at the shelter took its toll. After my first child was born, the thin film of membrane that separated my own psyche from the psyche of the women and children at the shelter had evaporated. The hurt they felt, I

absorbed. It had all become too close, too hard. The time had come for me to move on.

Yet during my time at the shelter, I had learned a great deal about fundraising and the impact it could have on people's lives. I was convinced of its usefulness and started a fundraising and communications consulting company, which ended up, over the next 20 years, having some of the country's most interesting nonprofit groups as its clients.

But what I didn't quite realize at the time is that I had made a leap from activism to charity, a chasm I never fully appreciated until the jump had been made. And, in the intervening years, as activism of the kind that brought attention to issues like violence against women has retreated, that crevasse has widened execrably.

There's the parable about two men fishing along side a riverbank when a crying drowning baby floats by. The men swim out to the baby and bring her safely to shore. Just as they get to the riverbank, they see two more crying drowning babies floating by. As soon as they reach the riverbank with those infants, they see another two crying drowning babies floating by. One man dives straight back into the river and the other runs away, upstream. The man in the river calls out, "Hey Joe, where are you going? Aren't you going to help me with these babies."

"I going upstream to see why they are ending up in the river," Joe replies and runs off.

Are charities the equivalent of plucking children out of harm's way without ever addressing what's harming them in the first place? Or are they a Dickensian concept that allows inequity to persist by filling people's bellies often enough for

them to feel grateful instead of dealing with the question of why their bellies were empty in the first place?

And what are we doing while those crying drowning babies keep floating down the river?

INTRODUCTION

The amount of money generated by charities from private-sector fundraising in Canada and around the world has never been greater than it is today. In certain sectors, the sums of cash are unprecedented.

Toronto's Princess Margaret Cancer Hospital's current *Believe It!* campaign for personalized cancer treatment research has a goal of \$1 billion. When University of Toronto unveiled its \$2 billion *Boundless* campaign, the largest fundraising campaign in Canadian history, on November 20, 2011, it ripped that top spot right out of the hands of west coast university, UBC, which 43 days previously had made its own historic \$1.5 billion declaration for its *Start an Evolution* campaign.

You could be forgiven for thinking the timing a cold-blooded move that, while personifying the competition in the sector, no doubt contributed to the numerous reasons why many Canadians hate Toronto.

The amounts of money in play are particularly mind-boggling in consideration of results.

Has the quality of post-secondary education improved as a result of massive investments of private cash to Canadian universities where first year courses routinely have classes of numbering in the hundreds or even a thousand students? Do indigenous people living in remote communities have clean

drinking water because of the endowed research chairs at universities and hospitals? Has cancer been beaten? Why not?

How are the hundreds of millions of dollars raised every year for bio-medical cancer research rationalized while medical authorities the world over tell us prevention initiatives will save more lives? Why do we give to charities? How do they ignite our passion? Defy our logic?

In the past two decades, as fundraising has become the raucous tail wagging the accommodating dog, charities have lost sight of their missions. Many do not judge their success on their progress in ending poverty, curing cancer or whatever the purpose of their existence, but on how much money they raise and how little they spend on administration.

Trust in charities is diminishing and manipulation by charities is growing as they spend more money to develop new ways of marketing to people's most intimate fears.

In the past 20 years, we've watched the gap between the rich and the poor grow. Unsurprisingly, that equity gap is mirrored in the charitable sector. Wealthy charities, with the resources to dominate every marketing channel, effectively take in an ever-increasing percentage of the oxygen, and leaving less well-off organizations with scarcely the ability to breathe.

But charities are not obliged to care about the *common* good. Their constituency is the people who are related to *their* mission, the people underneath their umbrella. They don't have to concern themselves with people under other umbrellas or people with no umbrella at all.

In order to declare success, the charities, generally speaking, don't need to concern themselves with cause of global issues such as climate change, refugees, inequity, and the

growing incidences of cancer and other chronic disease. Most feel their job is well done if they keeping the money and the clients flowing through their organization in equal measure without rocking the boat.

Their attention and resources is on the person sitting across the room from them, which is, very often, a donor.

In this book, I have interviewed cancer researchers, international development workers, hospital foundation chieftains and people who have been observing charities for decades. Their stories make up the story I want to tell you, a story I think it's important for you to hear, one that will take you behind the lemonade stand, the fundraising gala and that brand new hospital wing.

I will be telling you where charitable dollars go, who controls the spending and how decisions are made. Some if it might surprise you.