[chapter two]

community

Becoming at Home in the World

Finding the Sweet Spot

We meet Bill Wallace at the headquarters of Enviro-Tech Resources, on the fifth floor of a graciously renovated old brick waterworks building in a suburb outside of Philadelphia. He takes us into a conference room dominated by an elegant piece of textile art and two large windows through which we can see his employees moving about with comfortable efficiency.

"We're environmental engineers and contractors," he tells us. "We have 17 branches and 350 employees. We basically work on hazardous waste sites across the country, addressing problems of organics and metals—heavy diesels, coal tars, things like that. We work almost exclusively for the utilities, transportation, the process industries such as petroleum and steel."

"One of our difficulties—which is being played out on Capitol Hill—is that the country literally does not have the money to clean up the sites that have been identified in a manner that meets the most stringent interpretation of the requirements, which I would call the edible dirt standards. We're trying to figure out a paradigm shift right now in this marketplace."

We ask how he feels about the current regulation climate. He smiles at the obvious. "If the regulations are taken away, people won't do anything. Now, you may ask, 'Where's the moral fiber of these folks?' but it's 'the tragedy of the commons.' If just one good-hearted person running a foundry on the west end

of town says, 'I don't like the fact that we're putting out iron oxide emissions, and we're going to clean this down to the lowest imaginable level,' and the guy on the east end of town decides, 'To hell with it, I don't care,' then, frankly, the second guy's costs are going to be a lot lower. The first guy can't keep his business competitive if he's the only one who cleans up his act. There have to be regulations that everyone has to meet or nothing is done. And then the question is, What's the level of those regulations, and how safe are they in terms of sustaining the environment? What are their implications with respect to the economics and the market?

"Most people," he goes on, "don't understand that although we have environmental standards, they're difficult to interpret. So we do a lot of interpreting to industry about what the regulatory conditions are, and how you meet them. A big piece of our game is understanding the technologies that might be used to restore sites. We've been pioneers in what's called bioremediation, using indigenous microorganisms to clean up in a natural way, as opposed to putting a lot of iron on the site and burning everything to a crisp. So we try to be relatively innovative and understand what companies might do in a cost-effective manner, and at the same time meet the regulatory requirements, or go beyond them if we can."

He pauses. We ask how he manages to hold it all together, and he smiles again. "Well," he says, "it isn't easy. It's one thing to understand in the laboratory what to do, and it's quite another to make it happen on these sites."

The year Bill Wallace turned nine he spent the entire summer playing baseball in a field across from his home in their working-class Dayton suburb. There was something deeply satisfying about the game for him. "The crack of the bat against the ball," he tells us. "What baseball players call that 'sweet spot.' You connect with the ball and everything comes together. You know, you feel it inside. It's who you are. That's where I first understood who I was, in my gut, playing sports."

Back in his home it was harder to know who he was. He felt his parents loved him, but his father was on the road much of the time, selling industrial fencing, and when he came home, there was constant tension: "My dad had a huge anger." Though his parents found some partnership in his dad's business, "the emotional life in our house always was a little bit fragile," and he often felt trapped between his father's "rabid interest" in state and national politics and his mother's deep religious interest. "Those two driving passions in each of

their lives were fairly dominating. So family life was very stultifying. Sports were the place where I could be myself."

Fortunately, he was athletic and excelled in track, basketball, and football. Moreover, he was smart. He won the school Latin award, but his real interest was in math and science, and he fondly remembers Mr. Waring, a sixth grade teacher who "really loved science." That year, he won the American Legion Award for all-around excellence in academics, athletics, and good citizenship. "I was a very dutiful kid. Duty, honor, country. I had to be an all-American in everything I did."

His father worked actively on the Taft election campaign, and Bill, who kept a scrapbook of clippings, was "crestfallen" when Taft lost. His father, who quietly hoped his son would become either president or a major league pitcher, must have been pleased to watch his political interest. But Bill wasn't so sure. "I was interested in politics certainly, but I also knew that Dad's brand of politics was probably not mine."

He regards the enormous vitality he inherited from his father as a gift, but he also absorbed some of his mother's deep interiority. "I've always understood that even though I had this abundant outgoing energy, there is an internal life that's really important." Though from early on he resisted his mother's answers to religious questions, he regularly attended church, and "poetry and scripture were just burned into my mind over time," creating a love for language and symbol which "has always been very important to me." And the questions stuck. "I'm one of those people who asks the ontological questions—you know, Who am I, What does it mean to be?"

He looks back on life in Dayton as a secure equilibrium, a kind of "blessed innocence—a nice protected environment." But when he was sixteen, the family moved to Lansing. There, the friendships, the successes, the neighborhood buffers that had held him were gone. "It was traumatic. I had been a good student and a good athlete. I felt I had to claw my way back, and that was really hard."

Once again sports were central to his feeling of self-worth, and eventually he became captain of the football team. This time, however, his teammates were different. "In Dayton, I played ball against a lot of black kids; in Lansing I played ball *with* a lot of black kids." He also met Emily, captain of the cheerleaders. It was "a fifties romance," and they were married a few years later. Her father, John Geraghty, "a quintessential automotive engineer," became a role model.

An English teacher, Miss Farren, also helped. She loved language, and he can still recite with enormous pleasure the opening stanzas of T.S. Eliot's

"Prufrock." But she pushed him hard. "You think you're so good," she once told him. "Well, just you wait until college. You're going to find a whole lot of people much better than you, so you'd better start to work."

"Of course," he notes ironically, "that fed into the insecure side of me, so there were good and bad points about it."

Bill's first day at the university was "ecstatic." Away from the confining tensions in his family, "At last I could do it my own way." He did. His second year he discovered Professor Towle, "a real good advisor," who said, 'Let's take a look at what you're doing; here's a way you can do what you want; and we'll give you a degree for it." Later, he designed his own Master's, combining mechanics and materials.

But it was another professor, one Josh Davis, who was pivotal in his life. It bothered Bill when professors seemed to take more interest in their research than teaching, and he used to enjoy sitting at the back of his classes challenging under-prepared profs. One day in thermodynamics, he did this with Davis, and rather than snap back, Davis welcomed the questions. That night, Bill learned later, Davis told his wife, "I found a live one!"

Davis became his dissertation advisor, and when Davis moved to California to take a position in materials research, he invited Bill to join him and finish his thesis there. The defense work at Pacific Tech was "exciting, groundbreaking work" and "on the cutting edge."

A few years later, Bill and Davis went to Case Western as a "package deal." During that time, a citizen's group raised public concern about air pollution. Bill was proud of his profession, and it disturbed him that engineers, who could solve the problem, might be contributing to it. But it turned out that it was not just a technical fix. When he joined the county advisory committee, "It changed my life. I found out, to my horror, that my profession hadn't prepared me for the kind of questions that were asked, nor was I prepared to deal with the messy world of public policy." On the one hand, he thought they were making things too simple—"lots of emotion, but not much fact." On the other hand, it was clear that "the only thing industry could smell was money."

He took what he learned there and spent the next several years creating an undergraduate double major in "Technology and Society" that he proudly notes became a national model. But after ten years, he made the move to industry, first as a consultant, then as an executive. Under Reagan's environmental policies, however, the business went into a tailspin. "When we tried to merge with another company, we went through three rounds of venture capital and got our heads handed to us. Failed miserably."

Meanwhile, their children had become teenagers, and Emily, his partner of seventeen years, "the dearest person in the world to me," announced one Saturday morning, "You're leaving," and packed his bags. He had missed the warning signals. When he checked with their friends, they all told him he'd better go. That failure smashed through his armor right where the crest read "Success."

Nevertheless, he stayed home that night, put on his earphones, listened to Beethoven, and read Paul Tillich. "It was a long dark night of the soul. I sat up that entire night wrestling with my pride and the enormous humiliation and pain of being told to leave by this woman I dearly loved. It was one of the best nights in my life, but it was hard. About five in the morning, truly distraught, with Beethoven crashing around in the background, I found this great piece by Tillich called 'You are Accepted.' And I said to myself, 'It will be hard, it will be humiliating, but I'm going to stick if I can.'"

He and Emily found "a great counselor, a real hero," and old wounds began to heal. "I've gotten better at understanding my own failure and my own inadequacies," he tells us. "I think when you do that, you can see it in other people more compassionately. So it puts things in better balance. Before, I was into individual excellence, but—even though it had to be clubbed into me—I discovered the power of doing things as an organization. I'm a person of power, that's what I enjoy, and I have to watch myself all the time. But it's such a better deal to interest other people in the ideas and set them working."

When we ask what elements in his environment help him do that, he replies, "In this business we have a really great set of people. Emily and I really are a pretty good pair. And I still have a lot of interests, and people I love still in Cleveland and all over the country." But it isn't easy. "These businesses are hard to run because industry right now is downsizing and working with thin organizations and not much backup. You live by your wits, and the market whipsaws you. But there's always an element of excitement, and I need risk—I'd get bored without it." He seems to flourish on that edge. "That's where chaos is, but it's also where contributions are."

"It sounds like the 'crack of the bat' kind of thing for you," we observe.

He grins in recognition and replies, "The great plus in doing environmental work is that despite enormous controversy in whatever you do, you have the feeling, if you do the work honestly and with your own standards, that you're doing something for the good of people. And, sure, there's a whole set of people out there who say you're helping industry get away easier than it should. But I

don't mind that. It's in that kind of discourse, even if it's angry, that you get to the real truth of the matter.

"See, the sweet spot for me is in organizations. Martin Buber said that 'all life is meeting.' Well, in this world you meet in these messy commercial organizations. That's where the sweet spot is for me. And I was fortunate enough to understand that in some sort of inchoate way and move in that direction."

"And what's toughest?" we ask.

"Fratricidal wars between people," he replies immediately. "Two very good people—both of whom are important in the organization—who hate each other." He pauses, then, "Strange as it may sound, I want this place to be a caring community, in the larger sense. David Maister wrote a book about professional service firms. I use a phrase of his all the time: 'Your clients don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.' We've got all kinds of different people, but we have to treat each other with trust and respect and we have to care for each other. So I say to our people, 'Don't tell me you can do it out there, if you can't do it in here.' So we have to have a standard of trust and respect and care and decency here that we can take out, and if we can, we'll be damn successful."

Bill's story is important because it gives us glimpses, not only of an individual, but of his life world—the social and natural environments that enabled him to become at home in the new commons.

It is a story of "interbeing." "'Interbeing' is a word that is not in the dictionary yet," acknowledges the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, but "'to be' is to inter-be. We cannot just be by ourselves alone. We have to inter-be with every other thing."[1] One of the people we interviewed spoke of interbeing this way:

> As a metaphor, I think of how the skin is a permeable membrane. There's air flow between your skin and your inside all the time. I think that's how our relationship is with the world. There's this fluidity between the inner life and the external, a constant give and take so things that are happening on the outside do really come in to affect your own personal development and vice versa.

Indeed, as our consciousness begins to absorb the daily experience of living in a more complex social world, the dynamic, relational, and interdependent character of all of life[2] becomes increasingly evident, and the ancient debate between nature and nurture reforms itself yet again.

Clearly, both nature and nurture have a hand in who we become.[3] But as educators seeking to foster generous and responsible citizenship in the twenty-first century, we are concerned primarily with the questions, "What are the elements in people's primary environments—homes, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and other institutions—that nurture the capacity to act on behalf of the common good?" "How do people like Bill Wallace become citizens who are at home on the new commons?" Answers to these questions can inform important choices and policies that are before us as individuals, organizations, and a society.

At Home in the World: A Sense of Trust and Agency

To be "at home" means many things. But for most, a positive sense of being at home arises from experiences of interbeing that enable us to know we are connected in trustworthy ways and have some confidence that we can make a difference. Erik Erikson taught that the first great question of a human life is how to establish a sense of basic trust. His second and third great questions asked how we learn to stand on our own two feet with confidence, and how we learn to act with purpose. As we saw in Wallace's story, no one escapes some measure of mistrust, shame, and doubt,[4] but when these prevail, we may become defensive or passive. What is needed to undergird the qualities of citizenship required in the twenty-first century is a significant measure of trust and agency. We flourish best when grounding trust and agency are learned in the home from the beginning.

At Home during the Early Years

At the Heart's Core

"I was loved, therefore I am," writes Sam Keen.[5] "The first element of moral education is to learn what it means to be cared for and to care," writes ethicist Nel Noddings.[6] Commitment to the common good rests in a healthy sense of trust and agency, which in turn grows from the experience of being loved and the opportunity to care. This conviction is reflected in the lives of many of those we studied. When we asked Susan Jay, an ethicist-scholar, when and how she had learned that she could make a difference, she responded: "Constantly. I was bathed in that from the beginning. My parents thought it was hot stuff that I could walk, you know? So I knew I made a difference in their lives because I brought them so much joy."

Thus, central to our understanding of human development is that it matters who our partners are in the dance of life. Through the interplay between the potential we are all born with and the conditions that the world hands us, through the constant interaction of self and other, we create meaning—we learn who we are and how life is. As the self dances with the beautiful and terrible rough-and-tumble of the world, patterns are composed that we come to perceive as the character and quality of the motion of life itself.

This meaning-making activity lies at the core of every human life.[7] How it occurs and what it teaches is critical, because while we may or may not act in a manner consistent with what we say we believe, we will act in a manner congruent with how we ultimately make meaning—with what we finally can and cannot trust, with what we feel we can and cannot do.[8]

At its most basic and best, a loving home provides shelter, safety, nourishment, and a place to learn that the world is dependable, at least in some significant measure. In this first "holding environment,"[9] the kind of meaning we compose is largely dependent upon the quality of the interaction between parent and child.

The Early Home Environment

The primary mediators of reality during our early years are our parents, or for some, grandparents, step or foster parents, or older siblings. They teach us how things are: whom to trust, whom to shun, what is safe and what is dangerous, how to love, and how to hate. In the mini-commons of the home, we learn in a preverbal, bone-deep way, fundamental dispositions toward generosity or meanness, respect or scorn, equality or domination.[10] Through the give and take of these early relationships, the child composes core patterns of life with others.

In a classic study, Mary Ainsworth closely observed mother-child pairs over a period of months, finding that the most effective parenting was that which allowed the child appropriate attachment while still sponsoring independent exploration.[11] Watch a father and his infant daughter "conversing" in gestures. As the father is holding the child, first he moves his hand toward her, then her hand moves to meet it. As they touch, he smiles; then she smiles, and so on. The two carry on a wonderful interaction as each responds to an earlier response.[12] When the dance succeeds, the adult's actions are sympathetically tuned to the child's, and the infant begins to learn that indeed, the world will work for her. The child thus develops a rudimentary sense of both trust and agency—a sense of being held and heard and the ability to act with confidence.

As Bill Wallace's story suggests (and as we will discuss in Chapter 6), not all of the people we interviewed were well loved, supported, or recognized in this way. In about one third of the families a parent had died, was absent, disabled, or otherwise dysfunctional. And yet almost all described at least one "good enough"[13] parent or other adult in their early years who enabled them to compose some sense of trust and confidence.[14]

Paulo Garcia, now an attorney who works particularly with workplace issues, told us: "My mother passed when I was two. And so my brothers and sisters and I were raised mostly by my father and relatives. He was caring and very giving to us and to others. He always felt that if you could do something for yourself that you could also do something for others."

Garcia's grandmother also played a vital role in his life. Living in northern New Mexico, he felt the sting of discrimination early. He remembers even as a very young boy realizing that there was no recognition of Hispanic ethnicity—just "O" for other, which he and others interpreted as "zero." Yet his grandmother, a strong woman widely known as a healer, taught him that for six generations his family had been important keepers of the culture and Catholic faith in their region, and encouraged him to continue the tradition. This gave him the strength to challenge schoolmates and teachers who made racist assumptions. "When you are abused emotionally, you can become a bitter person," he says. "That's why I thank God for my grandmother who was the first to help me channel the negative experiences I had in a positive way."

A Home with Open Doors

Human growth requires a healthy mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the reliable and the unexpected. A good home provides the protection of sturdy walls and a sheltering roof, but windows and doors are also essential. Through their windows, we glimpse a larger world, and through the doors come neighbors, friends, and strangers with stories, sights, sounds, and smells that nourish a sense of participating in a wider belonging. The childhood homes of the people we studied ranged widely from cramped to spacious, barren to opulent. But common to most was a core of love surrounded by a kind of porous boundary allowing interchange with the wider world, planting seeds for participation in an enlarged sphere.

A Public Parent

A primary way by which this exchange can occur is through the caring activity of a "public parent." Slightly more than half of the people in our study described at least one parent who was publicly active in a manner that conveyed concern and care for the wider community, either through their job or through additional volunteer commitments. These included a school principal who was a mother and a respected leader in the wider community, a businessman who wrestled with city hall to create a playground, a homemaker who helped to start a school for mentally retarded children, a farmer who regularly gave away a portion of his produce, a high school coach who built both teamwork and community, and Bill Wallace's father, whose interest in politics provided access to a wider public commitment.

In a few cases there were two public parents. Laura Henny, now a secretary for a legal aid organization, had a father who was a used car dealer widely known for being unusually fair and trustworthy, and a mother who built a comparable reputation selling real estate. Barbara Fox, a Baptist minister and member of the state board of education, describes her mother as "emotionally strong, spiritually strong, intellectually astute, and determined to know the truth." As the state's director of alcohol education, she brought home stories of the living conditions of migrant workers, stories that helped galvanize her daughter's commitment to the wider world. Fox's father was a minister and a physician who taught poor people how to finance their homes.

Even when the parents' vision was focused only on their own particular community, the child—still seeing local community as world—could grow that germ of community participation into a larger, more embracing commitment. For example, a man committed to international development warmly recalled his father's dedication to local town affairs. What matters, it seems, is to grow up in a family that cares about and participates in a wider public life.[15]

Busy parents today sometimes assume that to have "quality time" with their children they should set aside their outside commitments and focus exclusively on child and family for whatever few minutes are available. Others believe that their children will not understand or be interested in what they are doing. In contrast, many of the people we interviewed described having at least some access to their parents' work and to what it meant, either through direct participation or conversations overheard.

Listening from the Stairway

We were both amused and charmed to find an interesting pattern that we describe as "listening from the stairway" in which children sitting at the top of stairways overheard adult conversations about community affairs that nourished their sense of connection to a larger world. One woman remembers watching through the banister with her sister as debates raged in the living room over two neighbors who had lost their jobs when they refused to take an oath during the McCarthy era. And Stanley Tate, a theologian who has been able to create and sustain dialogue between liberals and conservatives, remembers sitting at the top of the stairs as a child, legs dangling through the slats of the banister, watching his father, who was the Justice of the Peace, carry out his work in the front room of their home. People would come bearing a variety of needs, woes, and disputes. His father not only mediated the law, but did so in a manner that conveyed a kind of thoughtful care for the whole community.

The Practice of Hospitality

The wider world becomes present in the home also through the practice of hospitality. Although he now travels widely as an international development officer coordinating relief efforts, Arthur Schwartz grew up in a secluded religious homestead in Ohio. Yet visits from the outside world played a critical role.

> We had missionaries from all over the world who would spend a night or two with us, and they'd talk about the work of the church in Haiti or in Australia. So I was part of a worldwide endeavor even though I grew up way outside of a small town. We were on a first name basis with people around the world. It was very empowering.

Others remembered hosting exchange students or foreign dignitaries, or simply observing their parents' friendships across obvious tribal lines. When messages of inclusion and hospitality were established in the home early, they seem to have served as a kind of inoculation against the toxic forms of exclusion that the child would later confront elsewhere.[16] But sometimes the world would simply invade. Fathers were called to war, racial injustice or poverty brought personal suffering, and painful national events appeared, unbidden, on the doorstep.

The world arrived in many homes through printed or electronic media—newspapers, books, maps, letters, magazines, radio, or television (see Chapter 5). What gave it significance as a formative influence, however, was the mean-

ing imparted to the news through family discussion. Perhaps because of conversation with adults about the outside world, many recalled the power of particular historical events in their lives: the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti, Joseph Stalin, President Kennedy, or Martin Luther King. In some important sense, these youngsters learned that they were a part of history rather than simply observers, or victims, of it.

Transforming the Meaning of "Home"

To become at home in the world of the new commons, we do not so much "leave home," as undergo transformations in the meaning of "home." Lifespan psychology, the study of how we change and evolve throughout our lives, has now permeated much of conventional culture. We have learned that people move through a series of passages—infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, mid-life, maturity, and old age. Each era presents new tasks and the potential to recognize and manage the relationship between oneself and the world more adequately. There is no shortage of literature about the stages of life's journey, from Shakespeare's "seven ages" to Levinson's four eras.[17] As the story is usually told, people move into, through, and out of each period in a sequence, taking on new characteristics and leaving the old behind as they advance through the seasons or ascend the steps of a ladder. The prevailing metaphor is that of an individual pilgrim on a "developmental journey."

The metaphor of journey is both powerful and limited. True, life may be seen as a sequence of departures and arrivals; sometimes we do leave important places and relationships behind. But more often they undergo transformation. It is closer to the truth to say that over time some parts of us remain constant and some change. Patterns woven into our sense of self in one environment often remain a part of the tapestry of our inner life even as we change. We never leave home entirely behind. We grow and become both by letting go and holding on, leaving and staying, journeying and abiding. A good life is a balance of home and pilgrimage.[18]

In this way of seeing, though we may indeed move from one geographical location to another, the growth of the self may be understood less as a journey and more as a series of transformations in the meaning of home. With each transformation, the boundary shifts outward to embrace the neighborhood, the community, the society, and perhaps ultimately the world. Thus, when human

development happens well, both initially and throughout our lives, we experience home as a familiar center of belonging and identity, surrounded by a permeable membrane which makes it possible to sustain and enlarge our sense of self while admitting elements of the widening world. Through successive transformations of the ways we make meaning of ourselves and our world, our sphere of trust and agency is continually enlarged.

Commitment to the common good rests, in part, in an anchored sense of "home" within the wider life of the commons. How, then, do our personal and institutional environments foster the grounded belonging we need, while simultaneously enlarging our ability to recognize the whole planetary commons as "home," and ourselves as citizens within it? To begin with, we learn that our family home is a part of a neighborhood.

At Home in the Neighborhood

For the people we interviewed, the steps out of the family home and into the larger world were most successful when encouragement from inside the home was followed by recognition from important others in a safe and welcoming environment outside. "Home" came to mean not only the familial household but also a larger geographic and relational world. Whatever sense of trust and agency had been cultivated in the earliest years was now cast into a larger realm we call "neighborhood."

Catherine McCarty works in the Roman Catholic Church at the national level, developing programs and policies for family and youth. "The neighborhood was there my whole time growing up," she told us.

> We lived in a neighborhood that was kind of an Irish Catholic neighborhood. But then right next door was the Italian neighborhood, and down the street was the Jewish neighborhood. My overriding sense was that all these people were reliable people. The neighborhood was kind of an extended family. My father knew all of these people because he was an engineering inspector for the city. During World War II we always got our meat from the kosher butcher—the triplets, Hirsh, Mirsch, and Yessl. My mother would get certain things only from the Italian neighborhood, and I often went to get these things for her and got to know all of these people. If I were to say what's really sort of outstanding, it is the sense of communal participation that was there.
>
> Summers were wonderful. All the families in the neighborhood would be out together on their front porches and stoops, and we would block off the street and put on

plays together. But all the parents were out there with us. In my own home there was also the neighborhood flow, people in and people out.

New places, more people

When children begin going to school, for most—their world of places and people—significantly enlarges. This venture coincides with a turning point in how children think. A new ability to take another person's perspective opens a fresh passion for fairness, and the growing facility for placing things in an ordered sequence enables children to see some actions as "better" or "worse," and hence to form the beginning of a conscience.[19] These developments shed light on the significance of the partnership between the family home and neighborhood.

Although for many children nowadays the neighborhood is less cohesive, less geographically concentrated, and more dangerous than in Catherine's day, it can still fascinate youngsters. Many people told stories of exploring and defining their neighborhoods. One man recalls his father taking him on walks around New York every weekend when he was young. On his rides to Grandmother's house across town, an eight-year-old city boy was amazed to discover how big the world was, and a small-town girl could name fifteen nationalities among her neighbors. Thus, as they moved through their elementary school years, the people we studied were developing a tangible neighborhood map that created an expanded sense of who "we" are, a sense defined, in part, by a broader ecology of institutions.

School dominates the lives of most children from the age of five until puberty. In school, most of our interviewees clearly acquired important knowledge, learned essential social, cognitive, and practical skills, and strengthened their sense of competence. Perhaps because schools are so integral to childhood, we heard relatively little about them *per se*, except as a background hum of daily life and occasionally as a setting of frustration or hurt. Interestingly, however, the schools that did stand out as memorable were those that intentionally created a pervasive ethos of mutual respect, caring, and productive learning, which set them apart from a wider social environment less attentive to the practices needed for positive human becoming.[20]

We did, however, hear a great deal about coaches or particular teachers like Wallace's Miss Farren. Schoolteachers who took a personal interest, who offered positive and productive learning experiences, have lingered for decades in the memory of the people we interviewed.[21] Most recalled such teachers by name.

While school provides an important opportunity for membership in a larger community, religious institutions can provide a sense of distinctiveness within an enlarging world. People we interviewed sighted a wider world when they saw maps of distant holy lands, learned stories of their people in Africa or Israel, listened to missionaries speak, or heard that people of all races were equally valued in God's eyes. Some met children of different ethnicities at church camp or when they visited people of their religious faith in another town. For those in our sample who describe themselves as having been positively influenced by religious institutions, their experience seems to have given them a secure sense of belonging to a particular people who were also a part of a yet wider world.

Other places and institutions were also important. To a degree that surprised us, places such as the ballfield, public library, museum, or zoo were described as memorable and decisive in people's lives. An environmentalist traces his passion for natural history to Saturday mornings in the neighborhood museum. For some the park was a kind of "commons" where kids came together across class boundaries. One woman recalls regularly dressing up to go to the local library with her grandmother as though they were going to church (in part, because they were African-American and in a climate of racism felt that they had to take extra care to be recognized as "respectable"). These were typically publicly supported institutions whose resources were available without charge. Had they charged a fee, many in our sample would have been unable to benefit from them.

People Who Recognize You

A sense of growing self-esteem is vital to the formation of the conviction that one can make a positive difference. In many stories, we heard about important and helpful neighborhood adults as well as parents. There were teachers who taught productive work habits, celebrated successes, and "watched out for you even after school;" coaches who took time, ministers who "took an interest in the kids and were like friends of the family;" a friend's mother who "really tuned in to each person" who visited; and a young couple "who were always attentive to me and my siblings." Clearly, parents were not alone in raising their children.

Catherine McCarty recalls how she started piano lessons.

A neighbor across the street said to my mother (I must have been five), "That child should be taking piano lessons because I've watched her skip rope" [laughs]. My

mother listened to her. Now that was another important person in my life, my piano teacher. I studied with the same person until I was eighteen years of age—from age six to age eighteen—that's a long time. And I never realized until I went back to piano lessons as an adult what a special relationship that is. That's an hour a week when someone is concentrating on you alone, and she was very supportive of me.

Several of our interviewees, bedridden for significant periods as children, spoke of meaningful conversations with caring medical practitioners and other adults during their convalescence. The combination of direct attention, real talk, and just the respite from some of the pressures of being a kid seems to have had a special power in preparing the young mind for a future of confident and constructive engagement in the world.[22]

Can Do

Many of the people we studied learned an important sense of "can do" during these neighborhood years. Developing agency and creativity took the forms of making things to give or to sell, playing games and instruments, and becoming proficient at schoolwork. Tracy Flanagan, who now addresses state policy on affordable housing, was the oldest kid in the neighborhood.

All the kids would come calling at our house, and my job would be to create a new kind of game. I created a town one summer, the summer I was 6. We had a mayor's office. I was a florist and the mayor. Everybody got to pick what they wanted to be, and they picked their own section of a backyard, and we played Petersville for an entire summer.

Later she remarked, "I developed a sense of what I could do and that I could have an impact. And that's a real sense of power: 'I can do things that really pull people together. I can do things that bring people joy. I can do things that clean up the neighborhood.'"

Justin Jordan now heads a staff of several hundred people in six different countries to promote economic development. As a boy, with his older brother and a friend, he started an organization in a closet in the basement of his home.

At first it was a secret because we didn't really know what it was. It was like your classic clubhouse. We called it X2 because it was like a spy club. And another friend started X1. Over a period of three years or more it evolved and began to get some goals. Then we were discovered, and we went public and it turned into a kind of club

that had various clubs in it—like stamp collecting, coins. Also we had a pollution club called Environment and Ecology, and we had a Helping People club which was, you know, what could you do to help an old person in the neighborhood do their shopping? There was an apartment building down the street where there were a couple of old ladies, and I used to run and get milk for them. That fit into that club. Eventually we had the whole cellar kind of like an organization. My brother was vice president and I was president.

Recognizing Justice and Injustice

When we asked Justin if he remembered feeling strongly about anything as a child, he replied, "I remember feeling strongly about unfairness in the world. That it isn't fair that some people have things and others don't, and if there's so much in the world, how could it possibly be that people are poor or treated badly?" Then he added, "I remember my mother being very clear that she didn't want us to live in an all-white neighborhood and go to all-white schools, and my parents thought about that a lot when they were thinking about neighborhoods to live in." Justin's comments reveal how children's early sense of compassion and justice often corresponds with a parental or family sense of values.

Several echoed Justin's awareness of gaps and contradictions: Why did some people—often neighbors—live in conditions that were so obviously less desirable than their own? Why were some children treated unfairly just because they spoke another language? For some it had simply been bewildering; others had spoken up and discovered that they could make a difference. Said one woman:

> I have never been able to think I was better, worked harder, any of that. None of those filters that other people protect themselves from the pain of humanity with have ever been available to me. So even in kindergarten, I was going home saying, "Agnes doesn't look like she's got a warm enough coat." And my parents would respond, particularly my dad.

Some discovered the contradictions by being on the receiving end of injustice, though at this age several appear to have been protected in some measure from the full sting of the prejudice. Cecil Baldwin, who later became Dean of a major professional school, told us:

> My parents were skillful in shielding us against the harsher aspects of discrimination. I remember I used to walk past a big white school where fellows I played with went, on my way to a little two-room school heated by a coal stove, using the books that my friends had discarded. And I asked Mother, "Why do I have to go to Washington

Grammar School and I can't go to the Third Street School?" And my mother said, "Well, you know, sometimes people are afraid of what they don't understand or of what is different." And she said, "We're different and white people don't understand that, and therefore they're afraid." Well, what my mother was saying to me was, "It isn't something that's wrong with you."

The continuing formation of trust and agency, so crucial to citizenship in the twenty-first century, is significantly shaped by the degree to which one can be at home in the neighborhood. Yet there comes a time when the neighborhood may become too small.

Home in a Community

As children grow into the adolescent years, self and home expand in forms that incorporate, yet transcend the orbit of direct parental or neighborhood influence. The dance of inter-being is transformed once again as one sees and is seen in new ways, and trust and agency are again recomposed.

Physical-emotional changes, obvious and familiar, are accompanied by an equally far-reaching cognitive transformation. A new vulnerability and a new strength are born of the achievement of a more mature form of perspective-taking: the ability to hold another person's point of view at the same time as one's own. It now becomes possible to see oneself through the eyes of others and thus to become self-conscious. This new awareness opens the adolescent to the tyranny of the "they." "They" now matter in a whole new way, and the desire to belong becomes at once more fragile and fierce. The question, "Who am I?", so important in the adolescent years, is permeated by the question, "With whom do I belong and who are *we*?"

As generations of traditional cultures have recognized through rites of passage, adolescence signals the threshhold of adulthood, the time when we join our community on new terms. We use the word "community" because it suggests that people are bound up with one another, sharing, despite differences, a common identity.[23] When this transition happens well, it marks an emancipation from the literal and concrete world of the child-in-the-neighborhood into the strength of a growing and more reflective person-in-community. Whether or not adulthood will include commitment to the common good depends, in part, upon the quality and mix of home and pilgrimage.

Home and Pilgrimage

With the onset of puberty, the metaphors of home and pilgrimage—and the vital relationship between them—take on new meaning. In the lives of the people we studied, home and neighborhood generally remained familiar anchors, but travel across town, across the state, across the world emerged with new power. Sometimes there were trips with friends—with athletic teams, the school band, or one's own family—and sometimes one traveled alone to an international exchange program or youth conference. Whatever the form, these experiences were particularly significant for the formation of commitment to the common good when they opened up a sense of trustworthy belonging to a wider world and included constructive encounters with others different from oneself and one's own people. Seventy-two percent of the people we interviewed had had significant travel experience by the end of their young adulthood. This is particularly interesting in the light of Howard Gardner's observation in his study of the formation of leaders that "future tyrants" generally elect "not to venture far from their homelands."[24]

When Laura Bingham was a high school senior, she participated in the "Wrigley Forum," a program that brought together thirty-six students from all over the world. They travelled together across the country for three months, forming tight friendships with one another.

> For me, the most exciting thing was that I learned about human beings. That had more power than boundaries or countries. The young woman from the United Arab Republic made friends with the woman from Israel. And then we learned that when they went back to their countries they would never even be allowed to write to each other.

In contrast to a journey, which could be unending, a pilgrimage requires both venturing and returning. A good pilgrimage leads to discovery and transformation, but it isn't complete until you have returned home and told your story. "Home" is where someone hears and cares about that story, helps you sort out what you have seen, heard, and done—whether it be a triumph, a defeat, a high adventure, or a wash. "Home base" for this re-composing of self and world might be some combination of the family home, school, religious community, scouts, the Y, a friend's home, or the hangout.

Peers and Additional Adults

According to conventional wisdom, the single greatest influence on adolescents is other adolescents. As a consequence, adults make much of the demons of peer pressure, while too often abdicating their own continuing influence. The problem, in fact, is not the peer pressure itself but where the pressure leads. The yearning to belong may steer one adolescent to an armed gang, and another to help friends rehab a home. Thus, the content of belonging—the nature of the social glue—is crucial. In a healthy community, adults have much to say about the content and norms of adolescent belonging.

When home base functions well in the teenager's life, there is a good mix of both peers and adults. As adolescents develop the capacity to reflect, they may begin to wonder about the adequacy of parental voices and test those voices in a wider circle of other admired adults. Parents remain important, but in new ways.

Sometimes the widening circle of adults is essential to survival. When Paul Chen was in the seventh grade, beatings at the hands of his drunken father grew so bad that he would stay away from home for days at a time. The owner of a neighborhood candy store gave him shelter, advice, and occasional work; a youth worker encouraged him to join the local Boy's Club; and a math teacher helped him piece his life back together after he finally had a nervous breakdown.

But for most, both adults and peers matter in the formation of commitment to the common good. A viable peer group is as significant for an adolescent as a primary caregiver is for an infant. The emerging teenager yearns for recognition from others who appear to be "just like me," in whose eyes she can see herself. Sometimes the cords of connection and identity are woven in profound and nourishing ways; sometimes they are superficial or even dangerous. This is precisely why it is so critical for adults to mediate the norms of belonging and purpose as teenagers are forming groups of identification.

When we first began exploring the formation of commitment to the common good, we invited people in various audiences to reflect on their own experience of the commons. As they did so, we repeatedly heard comments such as, "In the commons I grew up in, there were more people who cared about you." One man reflected that in his teenage years, before organized baseball leagues for kids, the ballpark had been a place where people of all generations played and gathered and worked out the concerns of the community. A man sitting next to him responded with quiet pride, "When I was growing up, it was becoming dangerous. The adults didn't know it, so we kids created a safe playground. We could all get there safely—and the blacks wouldn't dare come there." We then recognized together that the second playground had not fos-

tered a sense of the commons—a sense that "everyone counts"—but rather a "democracy with exceptions." In the absence of aware and committed adults, the potential of important connections with others in an enlarging world had been precluded.

In contrast, Tracy Flanagan traced her work as a mediator in energy development disputes to her early teens when several socially concerned priests used to visit her home. One of them, Mike Latrobe, was disturbed by the growing unrest in the two small black neighborhoods in the town.

> Mike came over one day, very concerned about this racial problem, and announced to my parents that he wanted to create a meeting where white kids would go as representatives. He wanted it to be kids talking to kids. He also asked Kevin Reilly, who was this very good-looking guy, three years older than me and president of the CYO, and then asked me, a geeky, nerdy freshman in high school.
>
> Mike wanted me to go to the house of one of the black families, the home of a woman who also was concerned and very active in defusing the situation. As it turned out, we were kind of the lightning rod for the anger of a lot of these kids. And yet because he asked me to do it, I felt like, "Well, yeah, I guess I can do this." And it was, you know, pretty nervewracking, but also it was not something where I felt that I was in over my head. It was just scary. And I think that's one of the things about assuming responsibility at a very young age and doing it successfully. You learn that almost everything can be scary, but if you kind of have a sense of who you are and what the situation is, you can deal with it.

Tracy's account reveals the power of adults to create safe space and facilitate encounters that can help young people meet one another with the strength of their frustration, rage, openness, and generosity in a world that is growing ever more complex, multicultural, and often frightening. Adolescents may well need to form groups of belonging based on ethnic identity or other forms of common experience. Adults who represent committed citizenship in the new commons can affirm that need, yet also encourage them to "keep the door open," so that others can be welcomed across the threshold, and people within the group can also develop relationships outside. Committed adults can encourage (sometimes with the gift of good humor) the formation of communities in which the terms of belonging invite inclusion, fairness, honesty, and other values by which the moral courage of future generations can be nourished.[25]

It is significant also that Tracy believed she could do something that seemed frightening because Mike thought she could. Her story reveals the power of adults to create a safe space for the development of trust and the ability to take action.

A Task to Do

"The young do not need to be preached at; they need to be given a task," writes Harold Loukes, a Quaker educator.[26] In adolescence, all the precursors of a sense of agency are brought to the test of finding tasks with real meaning in the adult world. We have just seen how Mike conveyed this to Tracy, and how she remembers it still. Similarly, Maria Velasquez, now developing leadership among urban youth by creating an innovative high school, was befriended by a Costa Rican woman who became a second mother to her, challenging her to move out into the world, locating financial resources for her projects, and "always saying, 'Do.'" The people we interviewed particularly prized memories of adults who talked and worked with them in ways that conveyed that they had something to offer in the adult world.

Yet one might develop a sense of efficacy and not necessarily place it in the service of a larger public good. To do that, it seems necessary to learn in some way that one has a place in the wider world and to develop a sense of "on-behalf-ness." In a world that seems increasingly to view teens as burdensome, untrustworthy, and potential trouble, how did the people in our sample learn this?[27]

Working with Others for Others

The kind of task that enables adolescents to learn that their contribution can be vital need not necessarily be sustained for a long period of time, nor need it be the kind of "charity work" that often comes to mind. The power comes from working with other people to make a positive difference.

Will Johnson, who has advanced the economic development of immigrant populations, told us:

> The social crucible of my development was the segregated South of the early forties, and it was very painful. We couldn't walk on the same side of the street as a white person. We couldn't try on clothes in department stores. Schools were segregated. I became aware of the wrongness of this through the influence of my Sunday School teacher and my older sister. My older sister was involved in the college chapter of NAACP. In 1953, she went to the National Convention in Dallas, and came back with the slogan, "Free by '63." I became intrigued. When I was fourteen, I organized the local Youth Council for NAACP. Many of my friends were apprehensive about what they considered radical views, and although I did have a lot of involvement with band, choir, and leadership in student government, I spent most of those years involved in church, and NAACP, and worked with Medgar Evers in voter registration.

Jack Hiebert, a minister who has created innovative learning environments

and challenges people to re-examine faith in the context of the new commons was asked, "When do you think you began to become aware of a larger world?" He responded, "One part of that is probably spending every summer out of doors, later going to camp, counseling in camps." Looking back on counseling at Y camp when he was fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen, he says, "I came naturally to work with people, to create learning environments for people, to take people places—up mountains or out in boats—to have a lot of fun with people and create ways for them to have a good—even transforming—experience."

Leadership

As these accounts reveal, the formation of leadership emerges in an explicit way during these years. "Leadership" can mean many things, but surely it includes the ability to mobilize others in positive ways. Many of the people we interviewed had opportunities to practice some form of leadership in adolescence.

In another example, Rubin Gutterman, who owns a profitable software company and seeks to help clients create an exemplary work environment, told us:

At my synagogue, there was a woman who was a fantastic teacher who had a pretty profound influence. We would be Hebrew school teachers for the younger kids in a leadership development program. So they were taking thirteen to seventeen year old kids, and in the midst of your adolescent problems, teaching you how to be leaders. Literally, like the concept of active listening. That was taught to me when I was fourteen. I think it taught us all to be more empathetic and more discerning.

Conversation

As Rubin's account suggests, undergirding this readiness for leadership is a new capacity for serious conversation. In contrast to mere swagger, conforming silence, or pent-up outbursts, conversation can provide crucial pathways to finding one's place in the life of the wider commons. People speak of how important it was to be able to talk about things that "really mattered." Susan Jay recalls her church youth group:

We had youth camp every summer and then would meet once or twice each semester for a weekend retreat. It was a group that was about something important: serious discussions about life issues—sex and politics and pressing theological issues. It mattered to me so much that in those groups there was an affirmation of honesty and integrity and pushing you beyond the bounds of what you used to think.

Then she adds: "The youth leaders were incredibly important in affirming a sense of a wider purpose, affirming my concerns, and giving me responsibility for beginning to act them out."[28]

This kind of conversation doesn't always take the form of direct face-to-face talk. In addition to the proverbial telephone phenomenon of the adolescent years, there is also the activity of sharing poetry, writing letters, creating music, sharing a science or art project, and notable among those we studied, engaging in a project on behalf of the community.

Conversations that matter arise from the teen's deepening sense of what life is about, a flock of new questions, and hunger for confirmation that others understand and wonder too. The opportunity to share the delight and angst of these mysteries welcomes adolescents into the more complex, luminous, and shadowy world they are now entering. These kinds of conversations help them find a place of trustworthy belonging. When they can explore concerns that "really matter" to themselves and the life of the wider community, their commitment to the common good grows richer.

A Community to Grow Up In

To foster commitment to the common good, a community must strengthen trust by providing a fundamental level of physical and emotional safety along with respect for the individuality of each member.[29] But to function well for adolescents, it must strengthen agency by also offering participation in the decisions that govern community life. With some exceptions, we did not see this quality of community as typical of what our society offers youth. A few remembered feeling that there was space for them to express themselves regularly and comfortably, and some remembered schools where questions were welcomed and insights affirmed, but many recalled only oases in otherwise numbing rhythms of superficial activities and discourse. Some remembered how good it was to be able to ride the subway all over the city, but most recalled a growing constraint on where you could and couldn't feel free to go. It seems clear that the conditions that formed our interviewees generally exist only in partial, temporary, or diluted forms today. Yet the quality of community available to our youth as they become young adults in the wider society has far-reaching significance for the formation of responsible citizenship.

Becoming at Home in Society

Young adulthood begins with the completion of the tasks of adolescence—gaining a consciousness of one's identity and capacity to contribute within a wider community. But this new sense of self and agency must now find a home. Two central questions loom: "What is my work?" and "Who will be my partners?" In adulthood, the great questions of love and work present the challenges of trust and agency in yet another frame.

By "work" we do not mean simply a job or career but rather a sense of one's calling—born from some reflection on life's purpose. Whether or not one is college bound, the task of young adulthood is to find and be found by a viable life "dream"—and to go to work on it.[30] In that quest, the twenty-something years are particularly tender and strategic. So much is possible; participation in the life of the commons can gather strength, moving toward more effective articulation. But along with the promise of their strength, young adults are also inevitably vulnerable to the quality of the environments within which they seek a place in a diverse, complex, and enlarging world. Mentors are guides in this process.

Mentors

At least three quarters of the people we studied were significantly influenced by mentors or mentoring environments.[31] Mentors challenge, support, and inspire. Although they have been around since well before Homer gave the name "Mentor" to the incarnation of Athena as caretaker of Odysseus's son, the term has only appeared in the social science literature of human development within the last two decades.

The term "mentor" has been widely used in recent years to mean anyone from a children's counselor to a teacher of adults. We restrict the term to mean a somewhat more experienced person of either gender who enables young adults to make the transition from the adolescent's dependence upon (and resistance to) authority, to the adult's ability to include him or herself in the arena of authority and responsibility. The timing of this transition is not necessarily determined by age. While it typically begins in the late teens and concludes in the late twenties or early thirties, for some this journey does not really commence until one is much older.[32]

Mentors appear in many forms, including senior managers, professors, inspiring speakers and writers, master artists, job supervisors, coaches, public leaders,

college chaplains. They function as compelling women and men who recognize and support the emerging competence of the young adult, challenge limited notions of possibility, and offer themselves as beacons toward significant purpose. Often mentors know their protégés over an extended period of time; sometimes they serve only briefly in "mentoring moments"; and some—authors, for example—exercise influence only from afar.

When they influence the formation of commitment, mentors usually embody that commitment themselves, often modeling ways of seeing problems and offering helpful analyses. While passionately invested, they have a long-term perspective that draws the protege into the larger, systemic awareness crucial to the ability to see oneself not only in relation to work and profession, but to the society and the global commons as a whole. As the following Interlude portrays, mentors recognize the promise of young adult lives and give clues to finding practical pathways into adult commitments.

People tend to be drawn to mentors who know or have experienced something that they sense they need to learn. In times of rapid and discontinuous change, however, the wisdom young adults need has often not yet been sufficiently cultivated by the older generation. Young people seeking work in the new commons may require, for example, new multicultural awareness and new technical skills along with the ability to cross the boundaries of discrete departments, disciplines, organizations, and sectors. It is often difficult to find mentors who can accompany them, much less serve as beacons of possibility. Nevertheless, they may be well served by adults who are willing to mentor by working shoulder to shoulder, providing good and wise company into territory unfamiliar to both.

Mentoring Environments

If one is to enter the world of adult work as it *now is*, a mentor who can "teach you the ropes" and "help you climb the corporate ladder" may be enough. We have come to believe, however, that if young adults are to form and act on a vision of society *as it could become*, they may well require more than a mentor alone. In a complex age of cultural transition, a *mentoring environment* may be even more significant. For young adults need to know that if they choose the road less travelled, they will not be alone. There must be the promise of a new sociality. The questions of love and work, partners and purpose are intimately linked.

In a mentoring environment a number of strategic influences are accessible

to young adults. These include *mentors* with complementary strengths and perspectives who gather around great questions and important tasks; *a diverse group of friends and colleagues* who share *common challenges and hopes*; and *resources* such as time, critical learning experiences, texts, and, when necessary, equipment, technical skills, and other knowledge. A mentoring environment that serves the formation of commitment extends the influence of the mentor and creates expectations not simply of "my career" but rather "our common work on behalf of the larger good."

Though the lives of some who are committed to the common good appear lonely or even heroic, more often than not during their young adult years they were part of a mentoring community, sometimes several. This experience seems to have anchored a confidence that, though they may not have remained in direct contact, many others share the dream and the work.

College and the Cultivation of Commitment

The dynamics of home and pilgrimage continue into the young adult years, but now the task is to begin a pilgrimage that will return to a new home—a place in the adult world. Higher education is not the only route to adult commitment, and a college education was not a selection criterion for our study. Yet all but two of our one hundred core interviewees turned out to be college educated, though not all had completed their degrees at traditional ages. Many have had further education. We believe that another study of committed lives could yield a larger percentage of people who have not completed college,[33] but, at least in principle, a college or university represents the elements of a good mentoring environment, helping people to cultivate the thinking, social, and technical skills needed in the new commons, and can be a primary catalyst in galvanizing adult commitment to the common good.[34] An effective college education includes experiences that challenge unexamined assumptions, sustain more complex understandings of oneself and others, and enable students to form commitments in a relativized world.[35]

Good mentoring environments often exhibit this cultural sophistication and yet are small enough to allow for individual attention. Tracy Flanagan found that her chosen school, small and near a major city, provided this and more.

> In sophomore year, I was ready to leave school—just didn't know what I was doing. Some of the people were extremely bright, but here we were in college being handed Nietzsche, and questioning: "What does it all mean?" But I had wonderful, mind-opening teachers. I met Dorothy Day and Rollo May. It was in college that I first had the sense of myself as a whole person.

Barbara Fox was also initiated into the wider life of the commons during the college years.

> I had my most important interracial, international experience of my life when I was a senior in college. The Hollingsworth Fellowship sponsored young people from all over the world, and our theme was: "World peace can be brought about only by world understanding." You can't understand people unless you live with them. The experience came at the time in life when it's needed most, when you're developing your philosophy for life.

Combined with great teachers, such experiences can be profound. Erik Norris, a career diplomat and ambassador, recalled a political science teacher and his spouse who invited students to their home, awakening Erik's awareness of politics, and a "very demanding but inspiring" French professor who "made me focus on values."

And recall Bill Wallace. When he went to California with Davis, he became "totally discouraged" with his dissertation. The theoretical part went easily, but the exacting electrical experiments were impossible. "I just couldn't do it, and I finally gave up in total frustration." For the first time in his life he had failed, and "it was devastating." His mentor just encouraged him to continue the defense work instead and then casually added, "If you're going to quit your dissertation, why don't you give me your notebooks and stuff? I might want to look at this again."

Bill handed over the notebooks and went to work full time, helping to design what he believed was a defensive system for nuclear weapons, missile shields using carbon materials to protect the nosecone from a radar signature. "It was very exciting work," he told us, "if you didn't have to think about what you were doing." But some "internal part" of him inconveniently "bubbled up." He did have to think about it. It did not take him long to realize that the work was not defensive but rather "offensive as hell." After six months he went to Davis and said, "I can't work on this."

Handing back the notebooks, Davis said, "Bill, I saved your thesis stuff, why don't you just take a look at it again—we should at least write an article about it so it doesn't get lost." Bill completed the dissertation within a month. "If it weren't for Davis," he chuckles, "I'd have thrown that thing away."

The Critical Years: Finding Work in the World

As Bill Wallace's story dramatizes, young adults need mentors and mentoring

environments to usher them into the world of adult work.[36] College may be an initial mentoring environment, but graduation can be a critical juncture. A job? Graduate or professional school? Travel? The choices are life-determining.

Keenly attuned to the manifold "mentoring voices" of their culture, young adults may turn to the voices of "realism" if their aspirations are met with indifference, cynicism, or even ridicule. "Work that really matters" may be replaced by "compensation that I can count on," as the young adult steps into the untried terrain of adult life.[37]

In contrast, R. Lowell Rankin, a foundation officer who negotiates complex financial arrangements for inner city renewal, remembers:

> In my senior year I had that funny feeling that everyone knew exactly what they were going to do with the rest of their lives, and I wasn't quite sure why I didn't, and I wasn't fully willing to admit to myself or anyone else that I didn't. And law school sounded pretty good to me, although I took both business and law school tests. My roommate and best friend was going to law school, and it seemed like a reasonable thing to do, though I guess as I look back, I must have been ill at ease with that decision.
>
> That Spring, about seven or eight of us signed up for a wonderful guy, a historian, who offered an elective course on Nigeria that met at a coffee house. Then I remember hearing about the Peace Corps. I told myself, "I'll take the Peace Corps test because it seems to be a national political development." I persuaded myself I was taking it just out of intellectual curiosity.
>
> Later my father called and said, "You have a telegram here from Sargent Shriver, and it says you've been accepted to go into the Peace Corps in Guinea." I had never heard of it. I went home and my father said, "Why don't you call the law school and see what they say?" I think he thought I'd be talked out of it. I called them and they basically said, "Go. You've got a place here when you come back." So once the law school had said you'll be even more interesting to us then, I decided I'd do it.
>
> The Peace Corps was a wonderful time to see what I could do on my own. It was two of the most educational and intense years of my life. I taught secondary school, was thrilled about the kids I was working with and their potential. It was an opportunity to do anything and everything. I worked on developing a library. I was very much caught up in the Peace Corps ethic that we were there to do good, and yet a lot of reality set in. We may have done some good, but what Africa did for us has created a lifetime debt.

Very few of our interviewees completed young adulthood still floundering. Peace Corps, travel, some graduate and professional programs, the feminist and civil rights movements, and some early jobs all provided mentoring environments for the formation of young adult commitments to the larger good. For some it was earlier and for others later, but by an average age of twenty-six,

most had chosen a path through which they could serve the common good, though not all were engaged in the specific work that eventually became their life work. And, generally, the evolution of their commitment was gradual.[38] Thus, one person served as a Navy nurse for several years before developing a multiservice health center in a small coastal city; another cared for her family before becoming a teacher and later an educational reformer; another was drawn from the formal study of economics into community finance and development.

Deepening Commitment

While most had found their vocation by the end of their twenties or early thirties, some experienced later periods of significant deepening or reorientation. A future philosopher and environmentalist suffered severe depression in his late twenties, haunted by bottomless questions: "Why is there such destructiveness? What does a person do?" It was not until his mid-thirties that further study enabled him to build the kind of insight and response that has made him an important cultural leader and a great mentor. And only when Anita Cohen had children of her own did she develop the conviction that "the stories on television could be a lot better" and build an organization to address those issues. Cecil Baldwin, who had been shielded from the worst stings of racial prejudice said,

> It wasn't until I was in my forties, at the time of the Supreme Court Decision desegregating schools, that I suddenly grasped the enormous disservice placed upon black people, and the critical leadership of black churches—the lone institution that black people own, control, program, finance, and direct.

Mid-life Reordering

Mid-life often brings a press for a reordering of priorities and a still further deepening of the trust and agency that ground commitment. As with Bill Wallace, mid-life can be a time when one's wounds and one's power may be transformed yet again, now into a more mature wisdom and a new quality of contribution. As an awareness of mortality catches up with us and the future is no longer infinitely revisable, some recognize that the young adult dream was too partial, inadequate, or unmet, and lost years must be grieved. Unrealized potential, unfinished business, and unmet longings may well up—or be called to one's attention—and burst through the assumptions and armor plates of the years.

Yet there is the possibility of learning how to live in more life-bearing ways with whatever has been one's suffering and defeat—the things that will always

hurt. Disappointments can clarify and reheal in the open air of full adult strength, releasing new energy to make good on the promise of life. If we attend to this inner work well, the essence of the young adult dream can resurface with potentially more mature power in the mid-life and later adult years.[39]

In the mid-life years, a few of those we studied changed the area of their commitment, taking up new agendas or searching out positions that would strengthen their influence. A number took time off to do the kind of reordering work just described. For most, the middle years brought with them an intensification of commitment. Said one person:

In my twenties and thirties things were so complex I felt pretty overwhelmed. In my late forties, time is shorter, and I feel more at one with what I am doing. I feel more confidence in saying, "Yes, it's complex, I don't know how it's going to come out, but this is what I must do....Yes there's ambiguity, yes, there's paradox, yes, it's muddy. But we must do this."

Several women postponed this reordering until their fifties, then took on new commitments. They are still going strong in their seventies.[40] Marie Warner discovered that the university where her husband was a renowned scholar would not accept her for studies because she was forty-eight. She was so furious and vocal that the chancellor appointed her and several faculty members to a committee that started a continuing education center for women. Later, developing interests that both she and her husband could share, she became a docent at the city museum, then head of the program, then a trustee. Her minister, who was working to develop lay leadership, asked her to take major responsibility for adult education. This unexpectedly led her to develop a program for the homeless, eventually coordinating fifteen agencies. Some of the homeless have since become real friends. Now in her late seventies, she reflects:

These people are my home. I grew up with all the superficial accoutrements of a privileged person—to be able to handle any social situation, especially as a woman and in the society I was in. Now the great joy is sloughing off all those layers, like an onion, to find that there's a me that is particularly able to relate and is lovable.

Virtually all of our older interviewees express a deepening confirmation of life. When we asked Ben Greystone, a pioneer in urban renewal still teaching public health at sixty-eight, what would be at stake if he quit his work, he responded:

When they offered me early retirement, I turned it down. There aren't many people in this school who teach this kind of stuff, and the students would lose. I'm not so egotistical as to think the world is going to stop because of me, but I have stirred up a hell of a lot and involved a lot of people in the process. But I think most of them can go on without me. I mean, it's hitting lately. You suddenly realize you've affected vast numbers of people. I came up with what we now call the "Vital Cities" program three decades ago. I see the state health officer and she says it's going to be the model for the state. I don't have to tell her what to do; she'll go on because of her values. There are a lot of people like this.

The Formative Power of Context

Most of the people we interviewed seem to recognize in their adult years that, just as they have been influenced by their own settings, in order to influence people they in turn must look to the shaping power of the contexts in which people live. Thus, a United Nations worker observed that for programs to be successful "you have to create an environment in which people are going to have more say in their lives." And an attorney told us, "Most people most of the time are not going to be heroes, so we need to create the conditions in which they can be their best; we need to structure certain kinds of rules that make us decent to each other."

Who Are My Partners?

No one has a vocation alone.[41] One of our strongest findings is that whether single or married, virtually everyone spoke of the importance of partners—kindred spirits—who share and help sustain the work. They may be family members, friends, former schoolmates, professional colleagues, or members of the same religious community. Often geographically dispersed, they are linked by mail, telephone, fax, meetings, common projects, e-mail—but most of all by a connection of heart and mind. As one person put it, "They are the people you call (or sometimes just think about) when you are down, when you are up, when you are just trying to muddle through." They provide perspective, comfort, advice, challenge, and most of all, the confirmation that one is not alone in the sometimes bone-aching, heart-weary commitment to the new commons.

Single, Married, Partnered

Twenty-four percent of the core group had never married or were divorced; sixty-seven percent were married, some for the second time; four had taken reli-

gious vows of celibacy and chastity; and three were partnered. Single, unpartnered people tended to be clear that the choice to be single was a good one for them. Being single enabled them, they said, to give more of themselves to the work—though some felt a certain stigma in a coupled world. Those who were married to spouses who shared their commitments likewise believed that their choice strengthened the quality of their work. We did hear, however, a complex, ambiguous kind of pain voiced by some whose spouses did not share their commitments.

Most of the divorced women had found their work hard to sustain within their marriages and had either found it difficult or chosen not to remarry. In most cases, divorced men remarried partners who shared their commitments. Most of the long-married women described partnerships in which they had shared collaborative work with their spouses from the start.[42]

Among those partnered in some form, most spoke of "a rich give and take," emotional support, and challenging conversations.[43] In several cases, the partners help keep them honest. "She tells me I am not Jesus," said one man dryly. Another felt her husband's recognition and support were crucial to her commitment, though they do not directly share the same work.

Those who were parents often conveyed that their children (and grandchildren) helped to ground their commitment. Surely not all lives need to be lived out in families, traditionally understood. But our study strongly suggests that some form of responsibility to particular others, or work that corresponds to the challenges and joys that marriage and children can bring fosters the development of the self-knowledge, perspective, and passion that nourishes committed citizenship.

Threshold People and Hospitable Space

Reflecting on the experiences and conditions that shaped the lives of our interviewees, it is clear that no single event or influence will ensure a committed life. Moreover, no one life includes all the contributing factors we identified. Some lives might have had only a few powerful formative experiences; others might have been shaped by many less intense ones. Taken in combination, however, it does appear that certain experiences increase the likelihood of forming the citizens we need in the twenty-first century.

We see two master patterns: trustworthy and transformational relationships with *threshold people*, and *hospitable spaces* within which those relationships

may develop and new forms of agency be practiced. Together these serve as powerful antidotes to negative forms of individualism and tribalism, enabling committed people to act positively and dwell with confidence in the midst of all of life's confounding richness.

Threshold people include:
- loving parents who care for the wider world;
- welcoming and diverse neighbors, teachers, and other children;
- peers and additional adults who nourish loyalty and positive purpose in the adolescent years;
- mentors who challenge, support, and inspire young adults;
- spouses, partners, and other family members who share common commitments;
- children and grandchildren who embody the promise and responsibilities of the future;
- professional colleagues and other kindred spirits who provide good company and invigorate vision.

Hospitable and safe spaces include:
- A home where trust and agency are nourished, hospitality is practiced, and the wider world is present;
- A neighborhood where it is safe to explore and discover different places and people;
- A community both within and beyond the neighborhood where physical, emotional, and intellectual safety is protected, and meaningful participation occurs;
- Intensive learning environments where group interaction is cultivated, responsibility is learned from shared tasks, and everyday experience can be brought into dialogue with larger meanings;
- Institutional environments (for example, day care centers, schools, youth groups, religious organizations, museums, libraries, recreational programs, and work places) that sponsor positive forms of belonging and learning, cultivate an awareness of living on the global commons, and teach that it is possible to contribute to the larger public good;
- Places that provide for reflection and renewal in adult life and thus enhance the deepening of commitment.

A Key Element

While no single experience can ensure a committed life, we found one common thread in the life experience of everyone we studied. We devote the next chapter to elaborating what we call *a constructive engagement with otherness*. In the story of Jo Chapman, we see a person who has made a choice to go "through the Trap" and build bridges between people who are in some respects very different, yet who inevitably share the new commons. We have learned that a constructive encounter with others who are significantly different from oneself is key to the development of a capacity for trustworthy belonging and confident agency in a diverse and complex world, a capacity that transcends the traps of individualism and tribalism and enables people to become at home in the new commons.