



Speaker 1: My name is Stuart Clark. I'm the executive director of the Town Creek Foundation and I live and work in Easton, Maryland. I became the executive director at Town Creek in October of 2004, and I'll complete my service as executive director at the end of September of this year, 2019.

The Town Creek Foundation is a privately endowed grant making foundation. It was established in 1981 by Ted Stanley who had retired from a career in the printing industry, and he retired. That career took place primarily in New York City. Ted was a sailor and had a love for the Chesapeake Bay and so he and his wife, Jenny, retired to Oxford, Maryland on the eastern shore of Maryland, and that's where they began their philanthropy associated with the Town Creek Foundation.

Ted had done very well financially in his career and upon his retirement he began to provide financial support to a variety of organizations that he felt were doing good work. Over time the volume of giving that he was doing grew to the point where it made sense to establish a foundation, and which he did. Called it the Town Creek Foundation, after the body of water on which his home in Oxford sits. That was in 1981.

The Foundation initially focused on supporting organizations working to help protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay. Quickly expanded to a variety of other issues including investigative journalism and nuclear nonproliferation as well as environmental work in other parts of the country, including the Southern Appalachian National Forest and different kinds of initiatives across the west. Over the course of its history, it invested over a hundred million dollars in work in those different areas to try and improve conditions in the United States.

Several things that I take from the experience of being executive director with the Town Creek Foundation that I think are especially important, one is of course the capacity, the courage, the commitment, the dedication, the intelligence of the folks whose work we have supported over these years. I'm honored and blessed to have played a small part in helping them to do the work that they've done. Every day that I went to work at the Town Creek Foundation, I was inspired by the people that we work with.

The people who do the kinds of work that we were supporting, nonprofit advocacy work are not the people that are held up as the heroes in our society. They're not the people that are looked to as icons of achievement or success. But in my view, they are those things. They are heroes. They are icons. They are exemplars of what we want people to be, the ways in which we want people to protect and promote and advance and support improving our world and improving our communities and our neighborhoods and so forth. So just tremendous, tremendous people.



I think also I was struck by the importance of ambition, importance of there being people who are uncompromising in their advocacy and in the goals for which they are advocating and who are willing to even at significant risk and significant personal cost, who are willing to stand strong for the amount and type of progress that they think is necessary and not to settle for the amount and type of progress that the particular politics of the day will allow. They won't always get what they're striving for, but we will get further than we would have gotten if they were not standing on their ground and making their case.

In a number of times over the course of my time with the Foundation it was very clear that that dynamic was at play. And that the fact that there were people who were willing to take uncompromising stance really pushed, enabled more progress than would have occurred otherwise.

I guess finally the last lesson I would say I'd take is is the interconnectedness of environmental work and social justice work that has become more apparent to more people on both sides of that, both people doing environmental work and people doing social justice work. But it was not as apparent, not as obvious 15 years ago when I started with the Town Creek Foundation and certainly not 30, 38 years ago when the Town Creek Foundation started. But at the end of the day, I am convinced that we can only have the world that we want if we fight for it in all of the ways and all of the places that it needs to be fought for.

And we can't have an environmentally sound, but socially unjust world, those things are connected. And so if we want environmental protection, if we want environmental prosperity, we need to fight for justice and we need to incorporate that fight for justice fully into the work that we do as environmentalists. I think those are the three things that strike me now as I look back at my 15 years in this work.

The Foundation was established in 1981 and it will dissolve this year in 2019. In 2010 the Board of the Foundation made the decision that we would spend out our assets and dissolve. That process has come to an end and we will, as I say, dissolve at the end of this year.

Most privately endowed foundations are established into existing perpetuity. And part of the way in which they're able to do that is their annual giving, the funds that they use to do their annual grant making come from the revenue generated by their endowment. That enables them to continue over time, assuming that the market is sound, enables them to continue to grow their endowment over time at the same time that they're making grants.

A small, but growing number of foundations, private foundations, have in recent years decided that rather than existing in perpetuity, they would spend out their endowment and go out of business and this would enable them to substantially



increase their grant making for the period of time that they would continue grant making.

That's a decision that the Town Creek Foundation made for a number of reasons, but a particularly important reason was the sense that there were windows of opportunity that were open on the issues that we cared about that would remain open for a period of time, but that would not remain open forever. And that therefore it was important for us to do all that we could possibly do during the period of time that those windows of opportunity were open. And in order to do all that we could possibly do, we needed to spend at a higher rate than would allow us to continue to replenish the endowment.

We have made our last set of grants. We did that in the spring of 2019 and we will dissolve the Foundation at the end of the year.

What's next for me is unclear. I'm currently exploring a number of different possibilities, but I don't know exactly which of those will wind up being my next assignment. I'm hoping that it will be a job and work that brings me as much satisfaction and gratification as the Town Creek Foundation has. I will be very fortunate if that turns out to be the case because I was extremely fortunate to be able to do the work that I've done for the past 15 years. There aren't very many jobs like that and so I'm not expecting that my next job will provide everything that that job did, but I'm hopeful. We'll see.

You know one of the things as we thought about how we would be exiting this space in addition to the grant making that we did through our last round of grants, we wanted to see if there wasn't a way that we could leave as an asset primarily for the environmental community information and perspective that is sort of generated over the period of time that we've been in business. Some of that we have done by archiving our papers and providing those papers to Indiana University. And so there's information about the work that we did and really the work that others did that we supported that will be accessible to people through those archives.

But we thought it would be just as important to try to provide a way for perspective on that work to be accessible. And we have been blessed over the course of the history of the Foundation to be in relationship with a large number of really smart, committed, creative people doing the work. And so we thought that if we could encourage them to talk a little bit about what they've seen and what they thought and what they think should come next for environmental advocacy in Maryland, that if we could get folks to talk about that, and if we could capture that that would be a wonderful additional legacy to leave for essentially our stakeholders. And so that's sort of the genesis of this oral history effort.



I'm really excited to see how it turns out because there's some really wise people that we've recruited to participate in this. There are a lot of places that people can go for inspiration of that sort for messages and around being the best that you can be and believing in yourself.

I guess what I would say, what I would want to add to that is sort of going back to what I said before, is that for people who have eyes to see and who have the patience to look, there are inspiring heroes all around us every day. And if people ... and I know that because I've worked with literally dozens of them over the course of the past 15 years. They're your neighbors and they're your teachers and they're people who you know as bus drivers but on their own time volunteer at soup kitchens or volunteer at homeless shelters. The world is full of heroic inspiration if you just open your eyes and your hearts.

It doesn't have to be about Marvel Comics and it doesn't have to be about the Avengers and it doesn't have to be about this or that, a popular cultural hero. The world's full of inspiration and heroism and I think that tapping into that is the opportunity that we all have. And it's an opportunity to help us to be the best version of ourselves. So I would just encourage people to not overlook the heroes that are surrounding them.