



Trickster Philanthropy

by Mark Brady

In October of 1995 the photograph on the facing page showed up in the faculty mailbox of Dr. Peter Yardman,* a professor at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. Depicting a rescue worker rappelled off the roof of a concrete high-rise performing an act of apparent heroism, it took a while before Yardman realized exactly what he was looking at – that it actually had its origins in a course he had offered in Spiritual Economics months previously. Attached to the photo was a short explanation and a simple note of thanks, which both surprised and delighted Yardman.

Based in Native American and far Eastern Spirituality, Yardman's course essentially invited people into deep inquiry about money and spirit. It also gave them something tangible to center their inquiry upon: Yardman walked into that class the first day and deposited ten, foot-high, banded stacks of hundred dollar bills on the desk in front of the class.

For the next ten weeks the class explored such works as Breton and Largent's *The Soul of Economics*, Phillips' *The Seven Laws of Money*, Butterworth's *Spiritual Economics* and they read a collection of articles

in a reader that Yardman had assembled on money and spirit ranging from Freud, to Jung, to John Templeton, to Adam Smith, to Alfred Keynes to Monty Python.

"After he started the largest foundation in American history, Bill Gates is reported to have discovered that it's almost as difficult to give money away well, as it is to earn it in the first place," Yardman said. "I think a LOT depends upon your orientation, your expectations and the intentions underlying your philanthropic philosophy.

"When I originally designed it, I had no idea what the results of this course would be. In fact, I hadn't even planned to offer my own money up for giving away. The idea came to me during that first class. It sent chills through my body, and I knew that it would provide important lessons for everyone involved, especially me."

According to Yardman, some of the lessons that were provided are still being learned by the students who participated in the class. Surrendering control, learning to trust, and regularly confronting fear are just some of the lessons he and his students grappled with as a result of that pilot course. When it became clear after the first six weeks that it was not going to be possible for the whole class to agree on a single "highest and best use" for the money, Yardman decided to allow the class to self-split into two groups.

The first group immediately made the choice to donate the money to friend of a classmember – Bob Lubin, a lawyer working pro bono, representing a patient suffering from ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis – Lou Gerhig's Disease). A large California HMO had contested the woman's claim to need 'round-the-clock home care. They were only willing to provide care for 16 hours even though the policy did not limit the number of hours of care required. Caring for her at home had stretched and stressed the family to the breaking point. The money donated by the group allowed Mr. Lubin to obtain many evidentiary elements necessary to successfully press the case. The suit was settled shortly after the Spiritual Economics class ended, eventually resulting in the HMO agreeing to provide 'round-the-clock care in this instance and in all similar cases. This outcome was unequivocally the highest and best use of the money the first group in Yardman's class could envision.

The second group had a much more difficult time coming to agreement on the highest and best use for the money and by the end of the ten week course they still had not unanimously decided what to do with the cash. Rather than take the money back and let them off the hook simply because the ten weeks were over, Yardman set up a conferencing website on the Internet and required the group to continue working with the issues until consensus could be reached.

He also required them to read two additional books: Zimmerman and Coyle's *The Way of Council* and Sheeran's *Beyond Majority Rule*. Beyond that, Yardman left them to their own devices.

Less than a month later, the group finally reached consensus agreement: they would give the money to a guy working in his garage right down the street from the Institute!

"My first impulse was an internal contraction," Yardman confesses. "I thought that the students were possibly trying to waste the money, to somehow get back at me for requiring them to do this extra work on top of their regular load."

But the guy working in his garage however, turned out to be the husband of a student not enrolled in Yardman's class. And the work that he was doing in his garage was a work of true mechanical genius: Dan Pomeroy was converting a commercial Stihl chain saw into an eight pound, gasoline driven, portable concrete core drill, one that could bore a four inch hole through twelve inches of concrete in less than 30 seconds! And the picture that arrived in Yardman's mailbox that autumn afternoon showed a search-and-rescue worker boring such a hole through the collapsed roof of a high-rise with Dan Pomeroy's successful creation. Once the hole was in place, a spring-loaded grappling hook on a cable was pressed through, it expanded and the derrick on the ground below then lifted up the collapsed concrete section and allowed rescue workers to safely free the people trapped beneath. This procedure has since been used time and again in earthquake and other search-and-rescue operations all over the world. The very first time it was used with Dan's portable drill was depicted in the photo that Yardman now has hanging in his office: that search-and-rescue worker is suspended from the roof of the Murrah Federal Building shortly after the bombing in Oklahoma City in 1995.

"There's absolutely NO WAY I could have planned for or directed my money to work on behalf of this effort," Yardman declares.

"The collective wisdom operating within a structure with clear intent and little interference is what ultimately accomplished it."

* All names and places are true in this account, except for the ones that are false.