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Defining, clearing, inspiring, and holding hope. As a father, I am deeply grateful to the people in this world who care about such topics.

I bring my story and the experience of Vibrant Communities to this discussion in the hope that the community building lens and the peace building lens can co-exist. They are sisters of the same cloth that come from a similar value and experience. Communities often face conflict from “outside” forces that larger political and environmental conditions affect them adversely. In this way many of the challenges faced by communities are beyond their control.

My experience, though, shows me that communities are most often the hope for “fixing” or mitigating the damage of the conflict. In place, people are able to bind together through shared values, mutual know-how. They can stand together and navigate through the storm, collectively. They have spirit and place. They are a micro system that, depending on their strength and ability, can respond in times of uncertainty. For me it is in place, in community, that the true hope and just world reside.

To drink and be nourished

In reading Aaron Wolf’s paper, *The Enlightenment Rift and Peacebuilding: Rationality, Shared Waters*, I was fascinated by the use of water as both a concrete tangible resource to rely on but also as a metaphor for describing and agreeing on what sustains life. There seemed to be a tension in the paper between the physical and the spiritual. Between need and hope, human

human need, drinking and being nourished. I think Aaron did a wonderful job playing that tension through his paper and left me needing to read it again and again to try and find the links and differences.

I kept thinking of a children's story, one we often use in community building circles, as I read this paper. It is the story of Stone Soup. The story goes like this:

A traveller without food came across a village. As he met one villager after another he asked if any had some food they might share with him that evening. Person after person commented on the poor weather, the bad harvest... "My meagre supplies won't do you much good," each said walking away downhearted.

The traveller settled himself in the village square and built a small fire. He took a soup pot from his bag, filled it with water from the village well and put it on to boil. Then, with some villagers looking on, he gathered some stones, dropping them one at a time into the pot.

"What are you doing?" they asked.

"Making stone soup," he replied.

"Stone soup," they laughed. "You can't make soup out of stones."

"Indeed you can," responded the traveller. "And it's delicious. Stay with me and we will share it when it's ready."

So the small group sat and waited and talked while the water boiled. Eventually, the traveller recalled another time that he enjoyed stone soup with some friends. One of his companions happened to have some carrots that they added to the pot. Oh, how it sweetened the broth!

"I have a few carrots," remembered one of the villagers. "Let me get them and add them in."

And so he did and the group settled again and talked some more, until the traveller began dreaming aloud about other stone soups he had heard of in his travels. “Some people put potatoes in their stone soup, others season their stone soup with thyme...” Soon others in the circle also began recalling their favourite soups, and as they did, the few items they had in their cupboards at home came to mind. One after another they went off and returned with a turnip or a tomato or some parsley to add to the soup. Some brought back their friends and family who had grown curious about the gathering they could see in the square and the sweet aroma that was now blowing in the breeze. In time, these newcomers joined in the dreaming and added their own favourite ingredients into the mix.

By evening’s end, the traveller’s pot was overflowing. Everyone ate well and all agreed that the stone soup they shared that night was the most remarkable soup they had ever tasted [World Neighbours 2000].

The resource to be negotiated in this story is food. On a physical level, it is the same as water – that which sustains life. As a spiritual metaphor it is also similar – that which gives life. The story in this way is about a hungry traveler in need of both physical food and companionship (community). The people of the village are not willing to share either food or companionship. In other versions of this story the teller often makes the towns people scared and suspicious of the traveler.

The traveler in this story is much more than a trickster that causes community members to give of their food. The traveler is a peace maker (builder) and a community developer extraordinaire. Yes, he was hungry for food to fill his belly but he also wanted companionship, community. So he creates a forum for conversation and agreement. Soon enough the entire village is enjoying a wonderful meal and a deep sense of community and communal experience.

This story I have no doubt actually happened - somewhere. It has now been told over and over by many people in many cultures and is used as a teaching tool. This story provides at least two important lessons. The first is the power of community unity during difficult times. It asks the listener to look beyond their own need for food and teaches the power of sharing. If we share then we can all live. Much the same as when we negotiate over water. Secondly, the story gives us a technique for unity. Each of us can take the place of stranger, the trickster to help our community to see their true wealth. We all have

the skills to bring a community into conversation, to share a little and to break down suspicion, fear and need.

I would like to bring this story to our conversation in January.

Collaboration in Chaotic Times:

What causes people to want to collaborate? To share of the resources they have -

In his article (<http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/129/savecollab.html>), *Can this Collaborative be Saved* (2003), Paul Mattessich outlines three points that we need to consider when starting a collaborative effort. The **first** is to consider whether there is a rich history of collaboration or cooperation in a

community lacks any or all of these factors they can still continue their efforts but I caution: we must be realistic. This is the “it depends” factor in action.

Think of these factors as good soil. If you have all three, things will grow faster. If you do not have the three factors, you will need to take extra care and collaborative efforts will require extra supports.

Fourth, communities learn to work across sectors. They build leadership teams made up equally of business leaders, government leaders, voluntary sector leaders and those people most directly effected by the issue (in the case of poverty those that are poor). These leadership teams often spend more than a year inviting people from their sector into multisector conversations about the issue they are addressing. These community conversations are most often the powerful force that builds community will and momentum for change. Finally, the cycle of people talking, agreeing to work together and then doing whatever they agreed to do together repeats itself over again and again in a cycle of reflecting, planning and doing. People learn that true change is not through one idea or leader but rather through a cycle of learning and change.

What causes people to want to collaborate? Can we help people to work together for the common good? For the past seven years the Tamarack Institute, a charity I co-founded with business leader and philanthropist Alan Broadbent, has been dedicated to understanding this question. Our mandate is to help communities work better together and to make the work of working together easier and more