

50TH ANNIVERSARY SPEECH

7-19-21

Thank you Marty for inviting me to speak tonight. It's a pleasure to be here with you. Every organization including its board and membership operates in the long shadow of one person and for the last few years that person has been Marty. Well done, Marty. Thank you.

HELLO TUCSON!! It's been 4 years since I last addressed TOG and then retired to the cool mountain pines of Payson, AZ. I miss TOG but I don't miss the heat of Tucson at all.

Was it hot this year? You aren't often the hottest spot in the union but it was hot enough in June when I made a short trip to Tucson. The day before I arrived I got an email from a Tucson friend

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Man it's hot there in June!! And DRY!! On my way out of town I stopped to get gas. I noticed a few clouds in the sky.....

Ahh, Tucson, I remember you well.

I'd like to add a little something to the history of TOG. At the 40th anniversary Tarke Sweet, the creator of TOG, wasn't present because she was in the hospital getting treated for cancer. She did attend a meeting a few months later and we were able to thank her for starting TOG and for her leadership in those early years. The next year she died of the cancer and a few of us went to her celebration of life ceremony. When given the opportunity to speak we once again thanked her for all she had done for the club, and by extension, for Tucson. We all have been in her long shadow since 1971. Thank you, Tarke.

So here you are at your 50th anniversary! What a momentous occasion. TOG has really stood the test of time. It seems like only yesterday that I was standing before you emceeding the 40 anniversary. A few of you may remember that. Half a century! Is that amazing or what? TOG has done Tucson a great service. It taught me to compost and garden in the desert. And those are skills that need to be brought to more Tucsonans and TOG is just the club to do it.

I know some of the members listening in tonight; some were board members 10 years ago. Mary Jane and I swapped jobs on the board. I took the secretary's position from her and a year or 2 later she took it back from me. But that wasn't the end of her service to TOG. She only recently retired from the board.....AGAIN. She may have logged the most years as a board member.

Aside from knowing her as a diligent and dedicated board member she is a good friend. We still talk via email. The thing that really bonded us together was our collaboration making compost bins, a chore she still does today. On several occasions we went to the city's bone yard of recycle bins; that's the place where old damaged bins go to die. The 2 of us would rescue some of those donated bins and convert them into compost bins to be sold to the public. We'd flip them all over in a line and I'd hand MJ the sawzall and get out of the way. With that power saw in hand she meant business and made short order cutting the axle off each one. After stacking 15-20 of those ungainly bins into the bed of her small pickup we'd lumber down the streets of Tucson—Jed Clampet style—to her house where she would wash them out. What a sight that was. Her body would be waist deep in a tilted bin, her butt waving in the air as she scraped and pressure

washed the inside. AH, those were good times weren't they, MJ?

Lynne East-Itkin, was the editor of the newsletter for several years and crafted it into a work of art. But over time it ended up costing more and more to produce so something had to change. Enter Victor Gutierrez.

He volunteered as newsletter editor and single handedly transitioned TOG's wonderful paper newsletter to the digital publication you get today. Victor proved to be quite skilled with a pen and a computer.

But Victor's contribution didn't end there. Victor became a good friend when we collaborated on installing the rainwater harvesting system in the church's community garden. He turned out to be quite skilled with hand and power tools in addition to being a good problem solver as we cut and hung over 40' of 6" pipe and installed a 2200 gallon water tank. He made that project a real pleasure.

Thank you, Victor, for your service to TOG and your friendship. I miss you.

Melody Peters and I organized and taught a tree pruning class together. And the trees lived to tell the story. Not bad for a couple of rookies.

Jim Lootens has been a part of TOG for a very long time. He is TOG's composting guru and starred in TOG's composting video. Have a question about compost and he'll tell you ALL about it. Thanks, Jim, for the education; you taught me more than a few things about composting.

And Bridget Barber. Unbeknownst to either of us she became my mentor when she brought me onto the board, as Vice President, at the age of 55. I figured VP's don't do much so....how hard could it be? Watching her presidential leadership through a year with 8 meetings, 9 newsletters, 2 plant fairs and 1 retreat, I was amazed at her skill at dealing with people, club planning and whatever problems arose. Then, at the end of that year, she and 6 other board members announced that their terms were up and that they were retiring. What a shock!! Thanks, Bridget. Privately I really expanded my vocabulary on that news. I made up words I'd never heard before. It felt like I was speaking in tongues. That left Darcy and me to recruit 7 new board members to carry on the TOG traditions. And one of us had to take on the presidency. Just imagine, TOG had just inherited a new president, yours truly, a guy who hadn't managed anything more important than his own tooth brushing schedule; what could possibly go wrong? As luck would have it, Darcy and I did recruit 7 newbies to the board, organized 8 meetings, 9 newsletters, 2 plant fairs and 1 retreat, just like all the previous boards. TOG lived on.

And that brings me to the subject of volunteering in clubs like TOG. Clubs need membership to exist and keep going. But equally or more important are the volunteers that make up the board. Here's a little story to make my point. In 2017 Denise and I retired and moved to Payson, AZ. One of the first things we did was to look into garden clubs; there were 2. In November of that year we went to a meeting of the 1st club. That was their board election month. ALL current board members were retiring. And guess what? There were NO volunteers to take their places. Dissolution of the club was discussed. At the December meeting, their Christmas party, there were still no volunteers and the club passed into history. This truly can happen. Please don't let it happen to TOG.

So then we went to the 2nd club's meeting, introduced ourselves, and told them we were new to Payson. And despite the fact that we had brought with us from Tucson the area's worst 4th quarter drought in 150 years and were on hand to witness the death of the other gardening club, we'd like to join your club. AND THEY TOOK US!! What were they thinking? Well, we made up for that inauspicious start by joining the board, taking over the newsletter and coordinating the annual spring plant sale.

And, as sometimes happened at TOG, volunteers were scarce, or we couldn't get volunteer commitments in a timely manner. So I'd like to impress upon you the fact that planners need help they can count on to reduce the stress associated with their events and activities.

And that's where the membership comes in. DON'T be afraid to volunteer. You'll meet new people, learn new things and grow as an individual, no matter how old you are. In my case, Bridget Barber, former president, changed my life. On TOG's board I went from being a somewhat introverted kind of guy who feared public speaking as much as the next person, to fearlessly taking the lead on almost any project and stepping up to a microphone with ease. Look at volunteering as a path to opportunity and growth. Please help your club! And if you still won't volunteer, then at the very least give feedback to the board. They need to know what you think, what works and what doesn't work. A club lives and Dies with its membership, its board and its activities. Be a part of it; make it happen; keep it alive. I'd like to be here at your mmmmmm, let's say your 60th anniversary—at my age I don't like to plan too far ahead—to celebrate TOG's continuity. Keep up the good work.

And, Bridget, I recently heard that you had quite a bit of fame and glory in your younger years. Well I'd like to add another feather to your hat. There's an old saying that we should all strive to profoundly affect at least one person in our lives. You can add me to your list. Thank you for changing my life.....in a good way. It has made all the difference.

Thank you all for allowing me to be part of this wondrous club. And thanks again, Marty, for letting me share some great memories; it's been a treat.

Things to add:

1. **Thanksgiving potluck moving from meeting room to the Knox room**
 - (a) With Hot turkeys in pans, 4-gallon pots full of mashed potatoes and greenbean casseroles in tow we entered the meeting room to find a cooking club holding their meeting. Move to Knox room
 - (b) Scramble to setup tables and chairs both of which were lacking. Scrounged more from other rooms.
 - (c) Buffet line was a squeeze in the little kitchen
2. Mary Sisson-Eibs could be counted on to do her **herb presentation**. Her email name is MOM-HERB
3. Tarke Sweet would do her fruit trees in Tucson presentation
4. One of board members came up with the idea of sponsoring **refugee families** at the church's community garden. One was an excellent gardener and put most of us to shame.
5. Tom Pugh did his compost tea presentation a few times
6. The **banjo playing minstrel** came to entertain us a few times. I didn't think the membership would

respond to a sing-along but they did and were quite happy about it.

7. The then there was the **olla ball fiasco**: A guy came to speak to the club touting the benefits of olla ball irrigation. He claimed to get twice the food production using 1/3 the water of a comparable garden bed. But no one could reproduce his results. It sure seemed to be a con job to me.
8. One speaker came to talk on irrigation and ended up speaking on nothing but **HUMANURE**. We dumped her from our preferred speaker list in a hurry. And were quite relieved to do it.
9. But overall my board experience with TOG was very pleasant. Only once did we have a disgruntled board member who went off the deep end. Typically we had great participation at the meetings with good ideas coming out of them.