*Intro to Session with Torchbearers Sunday, January 13, 2019*

*TNAG January 2019 New Orleans*

Hi Everybody. It is wonderful to have you all here to **Honor our Torchbearers and Harvest Wisdom from Our Community’s Amazing History!**

I’m Maria Teresa Gaston. I’ve been involved with the ToP Network for just over 5 years. I’m at a Methodist seminary now directing a leadership development program for Christian-inspired social innovators. We seek out and seek to support the adventurors, catalysts and investors working for communities where all can thrive today.

The idea for this workshop came last March when a few of my colleagues and I were asked by our boss to research and answer questions on features of a **human formation network** we are part of and present the results to the team. I chose ToP. The more I read, and learned through emails and phone-calls with some of our torchbearers, the more I wanted to know and the more I realized there was to learn.

My desire for an opportunity like this at the Gathering was shared by Laura Johansson. This idea would have stayed in the conceptual stage were it not for her gifts, commitment and collaborative leadership. Thank you Laura for all you have done to make this come to life.

[This is the fruit of friendship developed through co-training and collaborating professionally to further ToP among Latinos -- after meeting here at a National Gathering at a ‘birds of a feather gathering.’] ?

Laura and I share interest and professional training in human social and organizational dynamics. We both care deeply about the integrity and crazy depth of thought, values, research, learning, and practice all around the globe that resulted in the group process methods we use and teach and build on today through the ToP Network.

We intuited that many of us feel this way and it is wonderful to have you demonstrate that by being here.

Thank you to all of our torchbearers willing to share stories.

We often read in introductory sections of ToP course manuals: “The Technology of Participation methods were **co-created** over many years by staff and volunteers of the Institute of Cultural Affairs” (ICA – USA – about us) ***Note the carefully chosen words – co-created over many years***….

I’ll start us off with a **taste** of those many years of history to frame what we will hear fleshed out ….

All of what I’m going to say came from available writings and from conversations with Torchbearers present. A chapter in the *Change Handbook* written by Marilyn Oyler and Gordon Harper (2006) and from a document in ICA archives (wedgeblade.net) called A History of the Ecumenical Institute, the Institute of Cultural Affairs and the Order: Ecumenical (with important revisions by Torchbearer comments these days). Much more context and details can be found in Beret’s Chronology and in the New book Getting to the Bottom of ToP by Wayne and Jo Nelson.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs grew out of the Ecumenical Institute, an effort inspired by a resolution (in 1954 ck) of the World Council of Churches to begin a center for training of lay persons in North America in order to awaken, renew, and improve the service of the Church to the world.

There was some early history in the 50s ….I won’t say more about now.– precursor of the Ecumenical Institute was the Evanston Institute for Ecumenical Studies with involvement of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago and a German director who didn’t last.

Things seem to get cooking more when Dr. Joseph Matthews, who had been an associate professor of social ethics at Perkins Theological Seminary in Dallas was hired as the Dean of the Ecumenical Institute (in 1962 ck). Well – just imagine… He didn’t accept the position alone - Seven families from the Christian Faith and Life Community from Austin, Texas joined Dr. Matthews to form a “corporate teaching staff!!! (I LOVE THAT)*(See: A History…)* **and** live together in an **intentional Christian community they came to call the Order Ecumenical.**

The initial forms of what we know now as the ToP Methods were developed (and I quote: “through action research in the fields of community and organizational development.

… Group processes were carefully crafted to achieve certain objectives. The concern was to bring **methods AND spirit** to a wide public.” (Oyler and Harper, 2006, pp. 401-402).

The methods grew out of reflection on experience inspired by existential philosophers who promoted phenomenology – the studies of consciousness and the intentionality of human experience – philosophers like Kierkegaard, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and Ortega y Gassett we’ve been reading about at 7 a.m.!. Oyler and Harper write that “these authors were all attempting to re-establish that the **meaning of life was to be found in the depths of life and not in abstractions**. **The methods have always served to immerse people in the reality of their own situation and their own depths at the same time.”** (ibid)

Terry Bergdall emphasized that they were committed to “helping people see the real issues of their situation – not escape them – even if they were facing harsh realities. To face “Life, life, not false hopes and illusions.”

Maureen Jenkins shared with me that to understand what was happening in the community those days, one has to understand the US Context of the 1960s. The best picture of the backdrop of this era, she recommends, can be found in Ken Burns documentary on the Vietnam War – the section on 1968 – highlights

the assassinations, the struggle, protests and passing of the Civil Rights law, the reality of the on-going Vietnam War, the revolution of students, the protests and riots when MLK was killed.. to name a few.

Maureen says “We were living in an Era – even worse than today. Everything was falling apart. The whole neighborhood was falling down.”

Maureen told me “All of this was NOT AN INTELLECTUAL EXERCISE”. We asked ourselves, “WHAT ARE WE GOING TO **DO** ABOUT THIS?”

“Life demanded a MORAL RESPONSE.”

You’ll hear about that…

During the 70s and 80s the ICA and these methods moved around the globe and into many different cultural settings (Kenya, India, Latin America, and have been used in over fifty countries). The methods catalyzed community development efforts, impacted government agencies, and introduced transnational organizations to participatory change processes. (Oyler and Harper, pp. 399-400)

The ICA and ToP methods played a key role during the late 1980s and 1990s in the development of the profession of the facilitator and through helping to bring into being the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) in 1994.

You’ll hear about all of this and more in living color from our torchbearers. Not all was positive, positive; not all was negative, negative. We receive with honor, the lived experience of all of our torchbearers here.

*There are a few others here at the Gathering who preferred not to be on the panel (most notably Dennis Jennings, but who are great sources of stories and wisdom) and many others not with us who are great sources of wisdom. We hope this sparks your desire to continue conversations and learning.*

Ask your Torchbearers for other resources they recommend and for their own current writings and teachings, such as Nelson Stover’s, Through Three Portals.

Laura will explain a process we will follow.