

Closing Address
 North American
 Continental Youth Presidium
 February, 1981

THE WORLD IS WATCHING

I've been asked to share my reflections on this Youth Presidium and what I see to be the implications for our time together.

This morning, I feel a bit like Batman and Robin. I really had to get my day synchronized. As soon as I finish here, I'll run upstairs, change my clothes and I think I can make it to my class in time.

I feel like asking you to listen like the Koreans listen. The Koreans listen with their eyes closed. Then it won't disturb you that I'm looking at you, and it won't disturb me that you're looking at me. It helps you listen.

In order to reflect on this year's Presidium, I want to talk about the Presidium of last year. I have heard a lot of comments this weekend to the effect that this Presidium has been a great deal better than last year's. I get a little defensive, because, you know, I poured my guts into last year's. Last year was a beginning. We looked at programs basically -- the cluster experiment and Community Youth Forum. We created a song, a story and a symbol. We wrote proposals from the area to the area. We looked at alternative responses to the current situation of youth. I believe we had to deal with our internal life last year in order to get where we are this year.

Last year was a demonstration. Sixty-seven people gathered last year and we were being watched. It was interesting to be in the building for about a week beforehand. It was kind of quiet. People were not too sure of what to expect. They were a little nervous. All the time, there was this hubbub of conversation and excitement about the 1980 Presidium in the background. Last year was a learning experience. We learned a little about the youth revolution. We learned that youth were concerned about society. There was a deep social concern expressed by the youth around the tables that year. We saw that the world had dramatically impinged on youth. The draft rein-statement had just come out. People talked about that and the poverty of the education system. The group resolved to act, to do something. They expressed a very broad and serious collegiality for the rest of the movement.

Now this year, sitting in 1981 while I talk, we are still in the midst of this year's Presidium. I sat down last night to prepare my talk, but I really didn't want to begin until after I had heard the Declaration. It's still early to be able to reflect on all the implications of the Declaration, but I do want to read a part of the Epilogue of The Declaration of the 1981 Youth Presidium:

"We the youth, representing the youth from across North America, have gathered to discern where we are heading in the coming decade, in order to provide all youth with a vision of where we can creatively affect society. The pain and frustration that we experience today are in trying to enact our care, to be recognized as responsible members of society and to discover our personal vocations.

The journey of youth over the past three decades began with the defiant attitude toward established society, moving to complacency and self-absorption in the 1970s and is transiting toward a realization of corporate power. This corporate power is hidden within us and now is the time to see it creatively engaged ... (as demonstrated by the Guardian Angels group in New York City who help make subways safer), and as stated by Robert F. Kennedy:

'Our answer is to rely on youth. It is a revolutionary world we live in, and this generation at home and around the world has had thrust upon it a greater burden of responsibility than any generation that has ever lived.'

I trust that you mean that. I have created this talk with that in mind.

This weekend, I believe that the hotspot of the world was in Chicago, Illinois, in the Kemper Building on the fourth floor. People, both male and female, black, white, Spanish, Indian, Malaysian and British were here. Youth of ages beginning with 12, and 13 adults up to Desmond's age were here. People traveled from Canada, the Pacific coast, the Atlantic coast to be here. People who decided that they were in charge of the future gathered together and began to look, on behalf of many, at the future. This weekend, we learned something new about the method we used which enabled the team to happen. There was a dialogue back and forth all the time. The decor, these large black-and-white photos, the art prints and the quotations up on the walls were part of our corporate dialogue. The reflections, the movies that were shown, the Area reports, the rituals we used, and the solitary exercises we did all added to the dialogue. We are going to have to look at the method used again, and I imagine we will discover that something new happened. The important aspect of our time together was our teams. I'll talk more about that in a minute.

We ventured into arenas of society that have scared the hell out of other people. We have looked at education, the family, what it means to be significantly engaged in society. We have looked at rites of passage. We not only dared to ask questions about those arenas, we dared to pose some answers to those questions.

I want to say something about Presidium III. We will have one. Perhaps we will have to get a bigger space. Maybe we would do something like taking the Presidium to Fifth City and doing it there as a sign that it belongs to local community. If I had to claim a promise for the Presidium of next year, it would go something like this: "I claim the promise that

the Youth Presidium of 1982 be our gift to the world; that simultaneous to the North American Youth Presidium, there be one going on in another continent in this globe, so that they too are given the chance to shape their destiny and future and finally the world's future." This is only the beginning. We have something here that we need to share.

We need to look into funding so that we can enable everyone to get here. I miss a lot of those guys out there. There's Kristen in Seattle and many others. We need to think about them. I think that this Declaration allows for that.

Implications. What are the demands upon us on the other side of this? I have seen a lot of documents that have gotten lost in mountains of files. I don't think that this is one of them. This one will not rot. This Declaration places a delightful burden on us because it requires real action. This Declaration represents absolution. This weekend, we stood present to the brokenness of our times and, on the other side, we see that there are options, real alternatives. This summer plays a crucial role in the formation of practical responses. This Declaration provides a foundation for that work. I think a lot of people are plagued with doubt and anxiety about returning to their Houses, to their Clusters, to their schools and to their families. What do we do with the work of this Week II?

I've been thinking about that, and I began to toy with some answers. I said earlier that the team happened to us. I believe that the team is a response to the challenges that we face. I just want to read you a list of some of the teams I've been on: the Presidium team, the nexus team, enablement teams (kitchen, security and emerging generation), the camp staff, dog show and circus clean-up teams, auto show team, teams in the Student House, an Academy team, family teams, a team in North Dakota while working on a reservation, a team in the Billings, Montana House, Summer GRA teams, celebration committees, CYF teams, Town Meeting teams, a Centrum team, and I could go on and on. I don't know how many teams I have been on.

I wrote down my family because my family reminds me of this group. We are five people in five different places. But the team in my family continues. And I asked myself why. I think that there are several things that make that so. Maybe one is that they are five people in covenant with each other. It is a very unique team. You, too, are a group in covenant to a very real task. The task that your Declaration represents. The task of getting youth across the rest of this globe engaged in authentic living.

On the other side of this teamhood which this age group in particular knows about is the strange kind of fellowship or collegiality that comes from working together as a team. Oftentimes, it feels like a family to me. That is only one gift of the team. The newsletter, The Orbiter, is critical to this team. It is a form of accountability. It says, "I am responsible to the other members of my team." We need to send our Declaration to the rest of our colleagues across the globe. Maybe we might send articles to people, articles that we've read which just strike us as being right. We need to

tighten the network of youth who care across this world. We cannot lose even one through the cracks.

Leadership of these teams. Teams and leadership happen together. The leadership this Week II wasn't just the people up in front. There are leaders sitting around these tables, and next year new faces need to be at the front of the room. Being a leader involves risk; it involves creativity, and it involves the ability to play several roles. Being a leader means maintaining your own identity in the midst of playing the needed role. A leader also needs the ability to intuit and to be extremely sensitive to the direction a group needs to take. We all have intuitions and sensitivity, and it's a matter of trusting them. There is always the danger of not allowing other leadership to emerge from the group. Sometimes we have to step back to allow that leadership to show itself. We will learn to sense when to do that. Everyone in this room is extremely capable of leading. If you watched the presidential election as I did, you learned that leadership is in great demand today.

The other night at the Celebration of Alternatives, I went out with three other people. We went out to the Golden Key Restaurant and then came back to the second floor and talked. While we were talking, I decided to ask a question. The question I asked was, "Who has been on your meditative council this year? How did they get there?" I've been paying more attention to the folks on my council these days; who they are and what they say. One person's response to my question was, "People on my meditative council demand that I embrace my greatness. Generally, they don't let me fool around." These days, my council seems like a firing squad a lot of times, but they keep me honest. We need to learn how to listen to those voices.

I've talked a little bit about the team being one implication of this Presidium. That team includes all the movement youth and yet is created by unique individuals. Now I want to talk about style.

When I was in high school, our collegium room was right next door to the office. Occasionally, I would get a phone call from a friend. The call would come right when we were in the middle of singing. Did you ever try to talk with your hand over the receiver so your friends would not hear the singing? It was hard to block out the sound while trying to speak loud enough for my friend to hear me. Well, my friend would say, "Sharon, who is that?" I'd be really embarrassed. I'd explain that my guardians were in a choir and they were practicing. Another incident happened which was worse. It happened on a Friday or Saturday night after my junior prom. This guy was a complete gentleman. He walked me up to the door, and there he saw this plaque. You can't really hide those things. He read, "The Billings Religious House." Then he read more slowly, "The Ec-u-men-i-cal In-sti-tute. What's that?" he said. I answered, "I don't know. There are some weird folks that live upstairs." Other times when people asked why I never had parties at my house, I quickly explained that it was too small.

Lately though, I've experienced that this is no longer true for me. I met a girl at school. Her name is Cathy, and she's on the Student Council. We went to the cafeteria after class, and she began talking about the 20 million things that the Student Council had to do and how she was just submerged in the chaos. I experienced the deep desire to share what it was I knew about methods. I find it hard to sit still nowadays. I just want to share experiences with people -- places I've been, where my folks are and what they are doing. I don't feel ashamed of that.

I heard style described this way once. Style is each person's way of enacting his or her poem about their own understanding about life. I'll tell you that that was a kick in the rear end for me. Because that was permission for me to be one screwy Sharon Rafos. Be ause I am who I am. No more and no less. Period. All five feet six inches of me. One who stands at attention at every moment. One who stands present to the harsh realities of life, such as the fact that there are 15% in this world who have 85% of the world's goods. But at the same time, one who stands present to the utter possibilities of life and sees the greatness in both.

I have been addressed by the style of this group this weekend. There has been an intentional decision to be here. We have done hard work. We've done so much work that it feels like it should have taken all week. People have been here in every session participating to the max. I see a lot of giants in this room. You project a style that allows you to stand in the midst of the tensions that were talked about this weekend. On one hand, it is a very patient style. On the other, it can be very anxious. You and I have to learn how to juggle. Sometimes it feels like we're in the midst of a three ring circus. How is it we're able to dance in the midst of all that? It's a lot of fun. I think that this style and the team are a response. You can't help but be an address to people you run into. You can't help but be noticed. It's obvious to people you meet that you've made a decision about who you are and what it is you want to do. This team, the people in this room and the members who aren't here, and this Declaration, made by you and your colleagues, and the people on your meditative council will require of all of you your total participation. They will require that you remain steadfast in your decision.

My newest exemplar, and probably she is one for you too, is Diana Early. Friday night, when we were going around the room with each person giving their name and sharing one event over the last year, Diana's answer made me sit up straight. She said, "Diana Early, Chicago Student House. On the road to recovery." She didn't say, "I broke my back." Her statement holds the weekend for me. Just an uncanny decision to win. To make it in the face of incredible odds.

When we return to our houses, we go with our hands full. We take with us the vision stated in this Declaration. We go as members of a team that cares. We must look sharp, for the world is indeed watching us.