

## Remarks from Executive Director Ellen Ray at 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Gala, August 20, 2016

Tonight's theme is seeds of change. When Lissette Castañeda, our Community Engagement Manager, raised this theme, I was immediately struck by the beauty of the analogy.

Seeds are amazing! A seed contains the food and all the instructions necessary to sprout to life as a plant. When you get dry seeds they are dormant, lying in wait for water. Seeds end up in all sorts of places, disclosing their hidden location only when they come to life between the cracks of the concrete on our sidewalks, in our gutters, or in barren terrain. Seeds are spread: by wind, animals, or the cast of my wrist in my garden. Both spurred forward by the movement and also subject to it. Seeds are no one thing. There are millions of diverse seeds in the world. A small amount of water and they begin to come to life. And when they do they bloom unparalleled beauty, such that it can bring me to tears with the magnitude of its strength, whimsy, matchlessness, intrigue and perfection.

We are all seeds. CCL believes we, like seeds, all inherently come with what we need to live into our fullest selves. We are naturally creative, resourceful and whole. We are the answer to our own question. We are not our problems, we are not given power. We are powerful because we are.

We are all seeds. Blown about by the winds of our lives and, sometimes, by the cast of another's wrist. We often can't control where we land, finding ourselves in new places distinct from where we thought we would be. Possibly barren, sometimes downright unfriendly, sometimes full of new opportunity.

We are all seeds: different, varied, distinct. No two exactly capable of the same things. No two exactly made of the same arrangement of DNA. No two coming to life in quite the same way.

And like seeds, sometimes we find ourselves in a dormant period. A time when we are laid low, buried, find ourselves stationary in our lives. Waiting for something even we may not yet be able to name. CCL's clients often come to us in these dormant moments of their lives.

They are creative, resourceful and whole. They may be battered by the winds they have encountered or may have found themselves in a new place. They are no one thing or in no one circumstance. But they are all lying in wait. Ready. On the precipice of a new metamorphosis.

And CCL is water. No one would ever say that water saved the seed; that would be ridiculous. Water simply is at catalyst: one part of a complex recipe that puts in motion a process more impressive and brilliant than the act of getting wet. When we are doing our best work, CCL does nothing more than introduce a small amount of nourishment. We champion people. We affirm their gifts. We leverage their strengths. We tell them their dreams are worthy to be dreamt. We esteem them, challenge them, push them, and lift them up to their rightful place as miraculous and inspiring.

And people come to life. They find their confidence. They see themselves in new ways. They imagine new possibilities. They bloom. They are no longer encapsulated by what money they don't have, what jobs they feel stuck in, or the all that someone once told them they would be.

And we are all better together when we bloom: when we are freed to be our true, unabridged, unhampered, authentic selves. Who we have always been intended to be if we were offered the opportunities and resources to become. And in blooming we are a gift to one another! We bring

our energy, our strength, our matchlessness, our whimsy, our humor, our grace, and our generosity to one another because we are no longer held back.

Yes, we are all seeds.

But there is another way to consider seed - not as a noun, but as a verb. In my faith tradition, listeners are instructed to have faith like a mustard seed. I never understood this statement, really, until a professor in college shared that mustard was the bane of all farmers in antiquity. One seed getting into your field could mean, shortly after, an entire field covered in mustard. Mustard is a weed: it's wild, in some cases and places, invasive and self-perpetuating. Alluding to a mustard seed suggests that seeding something small, but powerful, can spread. It is catching.

Seeding is the action of introducing something new. It, too, is catalyzing. Once seeded, there is both risk it will fail to sprout and potential for it to spread, unchecked, untempered, into new spaces and places, bringing new life with it.

You, and you with CCL, seed, as in the verb, small wonders every day. You do it through your gifts of time, talent, treasure and ties, you do it when you share your stories, lend your skills, and open up your offices and communities to our clients. You seed the potential for change: growth and possibility, influence and impact.

In a moment, you will be invited to seed CCL's future growth through your giving. Together what we seed is powerful, catalyzing and catching. Together, what we seed tonight, in small gifts and small gestures, has the potential for greatness beyond measure. So please, consider how you have bloomed, consider the bloom stories you have heard and consider how you can spread that impact by seeding and spreading through your giving.

