



Suzanne's Fund

Suzanne Cluett International Family Planning Endowment

Suzanne Cluett Tribute by Bill Gates Sr.

October 6, 2005

Planned Parenthood of Western Washington – 70th Anniversary Celebration

For those of you here tonight who haven't had the privilege of knowing Suzanne Cluett, she is someone who has dedicated a lifetime to the cause we're here to celebrate.

I want to tell you a story about Suzanne that I think reflects that and ought to make you smile.

Suzanne has two sons— Nate and Johnny—who are now grown. When they reached their sixteenth birthdays, Suzanne came up with her own way of heralding their transition into responsible adulthood. She emptied all the candy dishes in the Cluett household of candy. Then, she proceeded to refill the candy dishes with condoms!

The boys were shocked, at first. But they too were veterans of this cause.

Chris Charbonneau remembers Suzanne attending "Seattle for Choice" marches years ago as a mother with two little boys in tow. The boys marched carrying signs they'd made themselves that said such things as: "My mother matters."

Of course, long before she became a mother or even met her husband Chris in Nepal while serving in the Peace Corps—Suzanne had demonstrated her interest in international family planning.

During college she studied exchange programs in India and Ghana and worked in reproductive health. After graduating in political science from Mills College and completing her Peace Corps service, she became a family planning advisor for the U.S. Agency for International Development in Katmandu.

Here in Seattle, she served for 16 years as Vice President of Administration for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health, (PATH) a non-profit, international organization whose mission is to improve the health of women and children in developing countries.

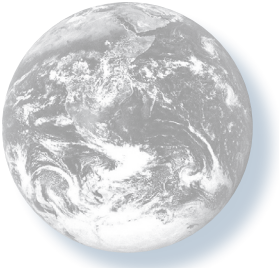
Since then, Suzanne has been with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as Associate Director of the foundation's Global Health Strategies program.

Along the way she has given more than 25 years of service to Planned Parenthood of Western Washington, doing everything from counseling women struggling with unintended pregnancies to being Chairman of the Board. She's also been on the board of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

The Gates family was blessed to make Suzanne's acquaintance, early on, as a neighbor who lived up the street from us in Laurelhurst.

Much later, when my son started thinking about the mission of his own foundation, I remember Suzanne taking me over to the offices of PATH. She also helped me schedule meetings with the Rockefeller, Ford and Packard Foundations, so that I could begin to learn what she knew about reproductive health.

That is one of Suzanne's great gifts to the world – she knows how to get people together, how to make things happen, and how to impart important knowledge to the world.



You might be amused to know that when we first started the foundation, it consisted of Suzanne and me working out of my basement in Laurelhurst. Knowing Suzanne's credentials I had been reluctant to ask her to be my helper in such a lowbrow operation. But Gordon Perkin encouraged me to do so. And when I did she said "yes."

Instantly, she became my right arm.

So if a media person, for example, came over and asked me for a piece of information I didn't have, I'd refer them to Suzanne. I'm told that sometimes when I made those referrals to Suzanne, despite her impressive credentials, I quite unconsciously used the words, (quote) "Ask the neighbor lady." I've taken some heat for that because Suzanne was surely the most over-qualified neighbor lady in the city.

Of course what Suzanne brings to any organization runs deeper than her resume. It includes reservoirs of wisdom and humility that have marked her life of service and enriched the lives of those around her.

Let me give you an example.

When Suzanne and Chris lived in Nepal years ago they became friends with a family of little means. That family included a young woman named Malati. When Malati was in her early teenage years, in following the customs of Nepal, her mother wanted to arrange a marriage for her daughter. Suzanne knew Malati did not yet want to marry. So she challenged the mother, gaining the upper hand by promising to pay for Malati's education for as long as she stayed in school.

This young woman ultimately graduated from college and married as an adult. It was a love match. Thanks to the Cluetts, her family has grossly improved its standard of living. Now Malati has a son of her own, and Suzanne and Chris are helping him through school. There is no question that Suzanne made a contribution to the life of Malati, her family, and many others like them.

We would like to honor her pervasive contribution. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is making a gift of one million dollars to an endowment at Planned Parenthood of Western Washington that will be called the **Suzanne Cluett International Family Planning Fund**.

It will be designed to provide a consistent source of funding for the international family planning activities of the organization.

In Cameroon and Ecuador for example, it will support programs much like the local teen council here in Washington. But looking ahead, we see this endowment fostering the kind of exchange of knowledge, resources, and understanding between peoples to which Suzanne's life has been a tribute.

So Suzanne, despite all the teasing I've taken for calling you "the neighbor lady," if anyone comes to me looking for a brief but all encompassing description of you to include somewhere in this grant, I'll tell them that "Neighbor Lady **to the World**" ... would say it best.