

Our Man in Bolivia

Bill Dyal, the Inter-American Foundation's founding president, knew just what he wanted in the men and women who would represent his new agency in Latin America and the Caribbean: "People who could sit in the ambassador's office in the morning, then get into a jeep or climb on a mule and in a few hours be in a campesino's house and be equally at home there."

Dyal knew his visionary approach to development assistance would have to be explained and defended both to U.S. diplomats who saw foreign aid as a tool for pursuing short-term U.S. interests, and skeptical Latin Americans aware of the unfulfilled promises of the Alliance for Progress and iterative U.S. interventions in their affairs. He'd determined that IAF staff would not live abroad, underlining that Latin Americans, not foreigners, were conceiving and carrying out their development projects. The IAF's face would be Foundation representatives (FRs) who shuttled in and out of the region for weeks at a time, touching base with the U.S. embassy as well as rural villages. Their job would be to visit the groups whose proposals had potential, analyze the feasibility, take a reading of community interest, then shepherd meritorious proposals through IAF's internal review process and monitor progress. From Dyal's tenure forward, FRs have also been expected to tease insights about development out of their experiences and communicate those insights in print and in public venues.

When Kevin Healy joined the IAF staff in 1978, he already knew his way around diplomats and campesinos. He'd been a Peace Corps Volunteer on the Peruvian coast of Lake Titicaca and the islands of Taquile and Amantani before Rough-Guide-toting tourists discovered the area, and he'd learned about embassies during a stint on a Georgetown University-USAID project in Paraguay. Additionally, Healy, who earned a Ph.D. in development sociology from Cornell, was a highly trained analyst of the historical, political and social processes that affect development efforts. And that, too, fit with Dyal's vision of a mutually enriching relationship between IAF's work in the field and the academic world. That vision had prompted Dyal, as he shaped the IAF, to consult with faculty of the Latin American studies programs at U.S. universities, and Healy was one of several Ph.D.s he hired.

Last year, Healy marked 30 years as a FR, the longest anyone has held that job, and he's not finished yet. He is among those employees who saw in their work at the IAF an opportunity to pursue intellectual interests and a strategic vision in which individual grants became building blocks in a long-term process. The specialized expertise they developed at the IAF brought international recognition, enabling several to move into key positions in-and in some cases to head-prestigious university departments, foundations, think-tanks, other development agencies and international institutions. Healy chose to stay at the IAF. As an FR, he has handled several portfolios-Panama, Peru, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Honduras-but Bolivia is the country with which he is most identified. And he keeps heading back, dropping in on the grassroots groups he has funded over three decades, looking for more like them and adding to his understanding of phenomena as diverse as the development impact of the narcotics trade and stewardship of natural

resources. In a public ceremony in 1989 the Bolivian Ministry of Education and Culture recognized his contributions to the country's development, and his relevant bibliography, with the "Gran Orden de la Educación Boliviana."

It was through Healy that I, then a free-lance writer on assignment in Bolivia, gained my initial insight into the Inter-American Foundation more than 25 years ago. At his slightly apologetic suggestion, I'd registered at the Oruro, a La Paz hotel. I landed at the airport close to midnight and gasped in the thin air at almost 12,500 feet as the taxi driver navigated through a very dark part of town. At the hotel, I had to stop every few steps to catch my breath as I dragged my suitcase up three flights to my room which was a decent size, but furnished like a monk's cell: a wooden table, one chair, a couple of narrow beds. It was cold-night air at that altitude doesn't hold warmth-and my teeth were chattering as I burrowed into the blankets. I knew FRs on travel got the standard government per diem, so Healy obviously could afford someplace better. Was the hotel some kind of ascetic guilt trip?

The explanation was in the lobby the next morning, although it took me a few days to grasp. Healy was due at the end of that week, and every morning groups of people in indigenous dress were downstairs, all conducting important business with the desk clerk. Several times a group approached me to ask when "Benito" was arriving. (Healy had warned me that people in Bolivia knew him as Benito.) Eventually, the desk clerk also checked with me and showed me the list of appointments he'd scheduled for Healy. That's when I realized that the Oruro, located near a popular market where thousands of indigenous Bolivians milled around, buying and selling just about everything, made perfect sense. Had the Indians tried to approach the lobby of one of the international hotels downtown, the doorman would have directed them to wait outside. Healy's hotel wasn't about his comfort, but about the comfort of the people who had traveled long distances to see him. Plus the lobby was free office space and the desk clerk a pro bono appointments secretary. I was starting to see that the Inter-American Foundation wasn't your typical foreign aid bureaucracy.

On a more recent trip, I noticed that Healy was now lodged in a wired-to-the-Web business hotel closer to the center of La Paz. Bolivia had changed as well in the intervening years. An indigenous leader is president and some of those who had waited in the Oruro's lobby preside over government ministries-like David Choquehuanca who, as a young Aymara from near Lake Titicaca, once successfully submitted his community's rabbit-raising project to Healy and is now foreign minister. Telling an indigenous person in today's Bolivia to "wait outside" is something you might want to think through first.

Several months ago, as part of research for a book on grassroots development, I began interviewing Healy about his work. I'd already talked to some visionary Latin Americans who had blazed new paths, but I was looking for insights into what makes a funder able to recognize and understand those visionaries. In Healy's case, it soon became obvious that part of the answer lay in an interest in indigenous culture he traces all the

way back to a trip to a Blackfoot reservation during a summer in Montana arranged by his father, a Washington journalist and a Native-American history buff. The interest flowered in the summer of 1966 when Healy, a college student, went to Peru with a Notre Dame service program that placed him in a Maryknoll mission parish near Lake Titicaca. "I fell in love with the beauty around the lake and the people," he said. That and the work he saw the Peace Corps doing motivated him to become a Volunteer after graduation and he wound up assigned to Titicaca's coastline and islands.

Those two years were like an overture, introducing themes that would recur through Healy's work in Latin America right up to the present. His first assignment, as an extension agent introducing Andean farmers to a new variety of potato-and its package of chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides-ended in disaster when the plants were unable to survive high altitude frosts. Worse, the farmers had gone into debt to acquire the new technology. Shocked, Healy began to question the vaunted superiority of modern methods. What, he asked himself, could a recent political science graduate with a crash course on agriculture teach farmers whose ancestors had, over five millennia, developed more than 3,000 varieties of potatoes adapted to the multiplicity of climatic zones up and down their mountainous environment? The irony grew more painful as he reflected that his own ancestors had fled Ireland three generations earlier when their potato crops failed.

Skepticism about the wisdom of pushing inappropriate Western technical schemes on the poor would remain one of Healy's constant concerns. Many years later, in his book *Llamas, Weavings, and Organic Chocolate* (Notre Dame Press: 2001), Healy would analyze the biases of Western aid, specifically the belief that Andean Indians were ignorant and a drag on progress and that imported Western solutions were the best hope for improving things. His Peace Corps experience and his graduate work planted in his mind the seeds of an alternative approach. When considering what had drawn him so powerfully to the Andes, he realized that it was precisely the richness of one of the world's great civilizations. He began to see the haunting music, the fine textiles, the native crops, livestock and medicinal plants, and the traditional forms of social organization as valuable resources that, meshed with the best elements of Western technology, could be the pillars upon which a different development strategy could rest.

Healy spent a good deal of his Peace Corps service on Taquile, a rugged island of steep slopes and terraced plots traversed by stone paths and archways, some dating from pre-Hispanic times. One of his projects there was to turn traditional skills into a source of income. He was first taken with the chullo, a stocking cap, then came to appreciate the island's weaving heritage that goes back to the ancient Inca, Pukara and Colla civilizations. "I thought the gorgeous textiles offered an option to earn something," Healy recalled. He came up with the idea of testing Taquile weavings for the pricier Cuzco market and helped channel them there. Years later the island became a tourist destination and the community organization that sent weavings to Cuzco evolved into an outlet for local sales. "Today, some 380 families are involved, we have four stores, and Taquileños remember that it was Benito who first had the vision," said Juan Quispe, a Taquileño whose father had worked with the young Peace Corps Volunteer. Juan's father, Julio, had a more amusing

recollection: "When he lived here, he sometimes wore local clothing. He would go to Puno with us, dressed like that, and people would say: "Which woman on Taquile gave birth to a white boy?" Years later, in 2005, UNESCO ratified Healy's admiration by designating Taquile and its textile arts among the "masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritages of humanity."

Between his service with the Peace Corps and graduate studies at Cornell, Healy, under contract to Georgetown University (where he had just completed an M.A.), worked in Paraguay with the Universidad Católica, one of the few centers of independent thought in a country living under a long-term military dictatorship. Jesuits on the social sciences faculty introduced him to a rural social movement based on liberation theology; it made such a powerful impression that he wanted to return to Paraguay to work on a thesis that would contribute to the movement's goals. In 1974, his proposal to do so won him one of the very first IAF Fellowships supporting dissertation research on grassroots issues. The Fellowship, though, came with a string—the researcher had to have an IAF grantee as a host. "But IAF's only Paraguayan grantee at that time turned me down," said Healy.

When the IAF found an alternative site in Bolivia's southern department of Chuquisaca, Healy readily agreed and settled into the town of Monteagudo for the next 18 months. "I wanted to look at elites," Healy recalled. "There was a lot of research going on then about the poor. But I wanted to study how elites shaped the development process to capture the lion's share of the benefits." The stay in Monteagudo also let Healy pursue another interest. "I saved everything I could from my fellowship and bought weavings," he recalled. The knowledge acquired would later lead Healy toward funding decisions that would help revitalize a dying textile tradition and bring it to international attention.

The resulting dissertation was a pioneering study that disclosed how the 15 wealthiest local families had successfully resisted the land reforms of the 1950s and maintained a debt-peonage system of labor. A handful of town-based "bosses" formed the other side of the structure, controlling local government, cooperatives and the region's largest agro-industry. The two power elites worked in tandem to assure that loans from the Inter-American Development Bank and funds from other sources were used to benefit themselves, excluding the rural majority and magnifying inequality. In 1982, the dissertation became a best-selling book, *Caciques y Patronos, una experiencia de desarrollo rural en el sud de Bolivia*, the first entry on Healy's 22-page list of publications and public presentations that professors living under publish or perish regimes at research universities would envy. It is a standard text in Bolivia, used by students of rural power relations, land reform, the Guarani peoples and development. It returned to the limelight recently when Healy was interviewed about it on Bolivian television in connection with the land reform law passed last year. The book's durable popularity is one of the bases of Healy's recognition as a scholar who is one of the leading U.S. experts on Bolivian development and indigenous movements. He draws from this knowledge in the graduate-level classes he has taught at Georgetown and American University and now teaches at the George Washington University's Elliot School of International Affairs as part of the Latin American Studies

core curriculum.

Healy's career at the IAF spans the decades during which indigenous peoples in many parts of the world moved decisively to free themselves from local versions of apartheid. His IAF work, in Bolivia and in other countries, gave him a front-row seat as indigenous movements took shape throughout Latin America and wrestled with poverty, discrimination, political exclusion and threats to the culture. In Bolivia, Healy saw the possibilities early on. "Given the high degree of political mobilization, it was clear to me that the potential was there for the indigenous majority to elect a president who came out of their own organizations and long-term struggles," he said. "I wanted to be part of that process to promote political empowerment from the grassroots, a process that owes a lot to the growth of civil society in Bolivia, which the IAF was part of." Indigenous Bolivians did eventually help sweep one of their own into office, an event at least as significant, and growing out of as sustained a struggle for civil rights and social justice, as Barack Obama's election to the United States presidency. When Evo Morales, made his initial visit to Washington in 2008, Healy was the obvious choice to introduce him at his first venue in Washington, D.C., American University.

The two men had first met in Cochabamba in the early 1990s, when Healy was visiting a group of campesinos in the Chapare region, where Morales' organization of cocaleros, or coca growers, was a powerful political force. By then, Healy had already published the first two scholarly articles to appear in the U.S. on that movement. "As we were driving out of Cochabamba, the leader of this group said we have to stop at the Federación del Trópico because we can't take a gringo into the Chapare without the approval of Evo Morales. We found Evo alone in the office on a Saturday morning, and when I first came in he appeared very suspicious and asked who I was and what I was going to do in the Chapare. I tried a number of things to allay his discomfort and I said that I had visited his home community of Orinoco, in Oruro, where we supported women's training programs. I mentioned a woman leader from Orinoco whom I knew via our grant, he immediately said she was a good friend. With this, the suspicion began to recede. When I named a few other NGOs we worked with in Cochabamba, his aggressive attitude evaporated, he turned on the charm of a true politician and was extremely friendly and sent us on our way."

The nearly 400 grants that Healy has funded over 30 years were not awarded exclusively to indigenous groups, but they have included important support for the Kuna in Panama, the Garifuna in Honduras, tourism projects on Taquile, microcredit projects serving women in Peru and for communities in the Ecuadorian Andes and Colombian Amazon. Successful grantees across Bolivia bear out Healy's conviction that indigenous culture can show the way toward real development. Many of their proposals were pioneering efforts to shift the emphasis from Western technologies to alternatives refined over centuries by a remarkable agrarian civilization. Healy's critically acclaimed *Llamas, Weavings and Organic Chocolate* describes how nine such IAF-funded trailblazers overcame the obstacles and succeeded in emphasizing long undervalued traditional resources as a means to development.

Central de Cooperativas Agropecuarias Operación Tierra (CECAOT), for example, is an organization of farmers that works around the harsh but beautiful salt flats in southern Bolivia to grow, process and market quinoa, a high-protein grain once a staple of the Inca Empire, bringing it to discerning consumers around the world. A group of settlers in the Alto Beni grew their production of organic cacao into El Ceibo, a cooperative enterprise that incorporated Andean norms of service and accountability and became Bolivia's major producer of chocolate. A herders' organization, after a long struggle, won official recognition of the economic, environmental and health benefits of llamas and alpacas. Not surprisingly, these grassroots agendas have been embraced by the administration of Bolivia's first indigenous president.

One account in Healy's book focuses on the revival of Andean textile traditions. A former convent in Sucre houses a textile museum and shop run by Antropólogos del Sur Andino (ASUR), an organization created in the mid-1980s by the late Gabriel Martinez, a Spaniard, and his Chilean wife, Veronica Cereceda, along with other anthropologists. Martinez and Cereceda were representative of the Latin American generation of the 1960s-young, sophisticated intellectuals searching for social justice and answers to their countries' problems in their indigenous roots. A wave of fanatically right-wing military coups from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s sent such people fleeing from one country to another. Those who survived-and many didn't-often found that exile expanded their horizons, enriched their ideas and propagated their ideals.

The couple bounced from Bolivia to Chile to Peru, but their passion was Bolivia, specifically the cultural significance surrounding the weavings of the highlands, a tradition endangered by the pressures of modernization and opportunistic traders offering ridiculously low prices. Many communities soon discovered they had sold off their cultural patrimony for a pittance. Cereceda was an expert on textiles and understood their central role in Andean life; Martinex spoke fluent Quechua. They submitted a proposal to the IAF for a small grant to help them identify and research a cluster of communities whose weaving heritage featured especially attractive designs. Healy's academic background made him receptive to the idea that research can be a tool in grassroots development-information and thought often usefully precede action- and he steered the proposal through the mill. The payoff was quick in coming.

Martinex and Cereceda settled on the Jalq'a community of Irupampa, north of Sucre, for their first of many weaving workshops. They arrived there just in time to find weavers who still remembered the traditional techniques and young women interested in learning them. But there were no models for them to use-all the classic weavings had been sold. So Cereceda contacted collectors around the world asking for photographs. Enlarged and hung on the walls of workshops and homes, the mysterious figures of ambivalent devils and fanciful animals floating and tumbling in a dim void spoke out of a collective subconscious to a new generation of Jalq'a weavers who started by copying them faithfully. As the worldview the designs represented took root in their minds, a renaissance appeared on the simple looms beneath their flying fingers. Cereceda organized exhibits to establish the weavings as works of art and with recognition came value. Today the weavings command a realistic price, and beyond that, respect. Unique to a previously

ignored and disdained people, Jalq'a weavings have become emblems of Bolivia, to be displayed with pride. ASUR stores and show rooms continue to be the most visited tourist sites in Sucre. ASUR has moved on to other traditions and attracts practitioners from throughout the hemisphere, eager to learn from its work.

The ASUR example tells a lot about how Healy's involvement with his work goes beyond funding and how seriously he has taken Bill Dyal's mandate to learn and communicate the lessons. Healy first wrote about ASUR in *Grassroots Development* in 1992. He later updated and revised the article into a chapter for *Llamas, Weavings and Organic Chocolate*, bringing the experience to a broad readership in universities, the development community and beyond. In between, he used other venues to get out ASUR's story: exhibits in the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., in 1992 and 1994; a companion exhibit at the Smithsonian's Sachler Museum; lectures at the Library of Congress, the Textile Museum of Washington, D.C., and at various universities. But ASUR is only one among several grantees to gain international recognition through such exposure. "Kevin has the vision to combine academic life with activism," said Waskar Ari, a former IAF Fellow and the first Aymara ever to earn a Ph.D. in history. Now teaching at the University of Nebraska, he remembers Healy and his stays at the Hotel Oruro in the early 1980s. "Years later, you see the results of what he funded, the big impact that transcends the projects themselves. More people should know about this guy, working at the grassroots."

Healy's career-long romance with the Andes reveals many of the skills and values that are needed for successful grassroots development. But maybe, after all the experience on the ground, all the academic training and lifelong scholarly inquiry is taken into account, it comes down to something as idiosyncratic as an eye for beauty, something Healy says he inherited from his mother, a professional interior designer. Even when he talks about the nutritional value of quinoa, he can't help mentioning the striking golden-red stalks waving in the fields. Once, in an isolated community called Rayqaypampa, Healy found his doubts growing as evidence mounted that the NGO of young professionals intent on revitalizing production of native species of potatoes were not yet understood by the indigenous farmers they were trying to help. For most FRs, that would have been enough to reject the proposal. But Healy's attention was drawn to the farmers' beautiful ethnic dress. To him, it signaled a strong sense of cultural identity-and a need to probe more deeply, which made Healy willing to bet, correctly, that community pride in local agricultural wisdom would eventually surface in support of the project.

Responding to ideas coming from Latin America is the essential core of IAF's approach to funding. It's an approach that gives FRs in the field a great deal of discretion to employ their personal skills and pursue their personal interests. They still have to get the project through a rigorous approval process, but perhaps only at IAF could enthusiasm for the beauty of a landscape or an article of clothing help drive a funding decision.

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