



WHO CARES?

*Introduction to the Graff-Reed Conversations*¹

Audio Track #1, *Canada Who Cares?*

Judy Maddren, 2007

Hello, my name is Judy Maddren. I host World Report on CBC radio each morning, informing Canadians across the country about the news of the world and about our own nation. We run stories we think most Canadians will care about. Many of those stories are event driven, stories about happenings, which will have an impact on our lives. You might hear about the inflation rate, the shooting of a police officer, the latest mistake of a politician, climate change or the evacuation of a town because of flooding.

The story I'm helping to bring you today is not event driven. There is no hook. But it surely is a story which effects every one of us and the slug it's been given is, "Who cares?"

Linda Graff is a non-profit management consultant and Paul Reed is the senior social scientist at Statistics Canada. And Graff and Reed are alarmed by the decline of the volunteer core in this country. They say the folks who turn out to do the often routine but necessary work to keep our society humming are getting older and they're not being replaced. The baby boomer bulge is indeed bulging with people but not people who give their time in the same way. And of course we are the folks who are going to need community support in a decade or two.

I think many of us just assume that someone else will pick up the slack when the call goes out for volunteers for drivers or group leaders or even cleaner uppers. We think well, some day I'll have some time to help or I'd love to help but I just can't give up every Thursday night.

What Linda and Paul have identified is a shift in our society which we might not notice until it's too late. They're concerned about a growing disinterest in the common good - what's important to us is important to me. And they point out that this looming crisis is about more than just figuring out how to attract more volunteers: it's about making Canadians aware of just what's at stake. We're all pretty proud of being Canadian. We like to believe we are tolerant, accepting, sensitive to the needs of others, hardy, fair, individualistic, multicultural - a host of good things. But as our country matures and struggles to adapt and support a changing society, Paul and Linda wonder if we're losing touch with all those good things. Are we forgetting about our neighbours? Forgetting that when we give to our community, it all comes back to us?

¹ Maddren, Judy. 2007. *Introduction to the Graff-Reed Conversations*. Audio Track #1 of the Graff-Reed Conversations in the [Canada Who Cares? Project](http://www.CanadaWhoCares.ca). Dundas, Ontario: Linda Graff And Associates Inc. Audio file available from: www.CanadaWhoCares.ca

In my own life a raft of volunteers work together to allow a friend suffering from cancer to be at home. They walked the dog. Shopped for groceries. Picked up the kids at school. Cleaned the house. Made meals. And held her hand. My mother works one day a week at the local library art gallery. She drives people to medical appointments and until recently worked in the hospital coffee shop. When I give blood, a friendly man serves me tea and helps the Canadian Blood Services team set up and run their blood donor clinics. Someone else phones me to remind me about the clinic. A friend of mine cooks and freezes meals for the church freezer so families who might need a little help can have a prepared meal. My next door neighbour serves on the board of the community health clinic. Another friend meets with Korean students each week to help them with their English. And the husband of a university buddy takes people on nature hikes to show them the beauty of our world. And yet another friend helps to maintain a hiking trail at the edge of his town. Of course the list can go on and on. And Linda and Paul hope that once we identify the often under appreciated work of so many volunteers in our lives and the lives of people around us, we'll get it.

Here's a couple of statistics: 67 per cent of the volunteer work in this country is done by five per cent of the people and every one of us benefits from these gifts of time and care.

So the work of the few is given to all. But – and this is the crux of the matter – those few are becoming fewer. It's estimated that volunteering may decline by two per cent a year over the next decade. That's not a big worry for next year, but by 2017, 20 of 100 volunteers will have disappeared. Who will deliver Meals on Wheels, or knit tiny caps for preemie babies, or sweep the sidewalk when a neighbour breaks his hip, or coach a t-ball team, or help to put out fires, or do anything to help us in our communities?

Linda Graff and Paul Reed want us to start talking about the future of our communities and about the quality of Canadian life in the years to come. They hope that by raising this issue now and reminding each other about what we stand to lose, more of us will be concerned for the common good.

Graff and Reed know what they're talking about. Linda Graff is one of Canada's leading authorities on volunteerism. She spent many years in nonprofit management and now delivers workshops and keynote addresses to groups around the world. She's also the author of 11 books and audio resources. Paul Reed has been a social scientist in varied academic and government posts for about 30 years. He's currently a professor in Carleton University's department of sociology, anthropology and law, and director of the Centre for Applied Social Research. He's also the senior social scientist at Statistics Canada.

It's important to know that these two people are very accomplished and experienced. But I think it might be more important to recognize how hard they're working to get us all to think about the value of our communities – and to talk about how we keep them healthy and good for each one of us.

So listen to these short conversations. Consider them, talk about them, and take action. We need to take part and we need to ask our friends and neighbours to do the same.

** Thank you to Volunteer Edmonton for production of the transcripts from the Graff-Reed Conversations.
www.volunteeredmonton.com