



"I have been remarkably fortunate in life. Growing up in a suburban middle class family, I got a great education in public schools and graduated from a state university with a valuable engineering degree. I have been employed at good companies, run a successful consulting business, and co-founded a very successful ventured-funded startup. A long while ago, I began to think about how I could pay back some of this good fortune I have had.

Like everyone else, I have always been inundated by phone calls, emails, and snail mail from various charities asking for support. For most of those requests, I declined or never responded. Sometimes I felt guilty about it, most times I just felt annoyed. When I did decide to contribute, it usually wound up being only a one-time thing. I probably had the ability to contribute, but I didn't have the desire to support the organizations that were soliciting my money.

Until a while ago, I never understood why I felt that way. Now that I think I do, I thought I should write it down.

When I was in junior high school, my dad was at the local shopping center picking something up at the grocery store one Saturday and, as often happened, there was a card table set up in front of the store with some kids selling stuff to raise money for something or other. These kids were selling something quite different from most, though. They weren't selling candy or cookies, or cakes. They were selling a record album.

The record album, which my dad bought, was sold to support the Bowie (Maryland) High School Starliners. The Starliners were an extracurricular activity, a 20-piece jazz band. The band had recorded the album and was selling it to raise money to buy new charts and to be able to get to jazz festivals and competitions.

The Starliners was run by a volunteer paid exactly one dollar per year by the Board of Education, Lt. Col. Joseph Carley (USAF Retired). "The Colonel" was behind the table, supervising the kids and talking to everyone that stopped at the table. My dad talked with him for a while and, being a pretty typical dad in this respect, bragged a bit about his son that played the alto saxophone. As it turns out, the Starliners were in need of a new sax player, since one of their seniors would soon be graduating.

A couple days later, I was in the Colonel's living room playing the theme from Mission Impossible. It was a piece I was playing in the junior high school band. I was auditioning for a band at a school I wouldn't be able to attend for nearly two years. The audition must have gone pretty well. I was told to show up at the practice sessions on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings.

I spent five years with the Starliners, meeting life-long friends, practicing, going to jazz festivals, competing against (and often beating) our arch rivals from Langley High School at jazz festivals, playing gigs at wedding receptions, bar mitzvahs, and bowling banquets, and developing a love for jazz.

My passion for jazz has never abated. I found [KCSM radio](#) when I moved to the Bay area in 1989 and haven't listened to another radio station since.

KCSM is a public radio station, supported by contributions from their listeners. I became a member of the station and have been supporting them financially for nearly 20 years. Since I retired, I have also been volunteering my time in their studio, helping to digitize their jazz LP collection, the third largest in the world. Nearly every week, I spend a day cleaning the old records, listening to them as they are digitized, and then cleaning up the audio to get rid of the hiss, clicks, and pops. Hey, it's a rotten job, but somebody has to do it! Unless a whole pile of new volunteers materialize to join me and the couple others doing this work, this should keep me busy for about the next nine or ten years.

We are digitizing the LP library to archive material that has never been re-released on CD, make the library accessible to historians, researchers, and educators, and for the library to be more easily accessible to play on the air. I'm particularly interested in the educational uses for the library.

I also found [San Jose Jazz](#) after moving to the Bay area. The most well known aspect of San Jose Jazz is its annual 3-day jazz festival in downtown San Jose each August. My enjoyment of that festival led to supporting them financially, as well. What I didn't learn until after they invited me to join their board is the extent of their educational activities. San Jose Jazz provides a large number of music education programs for students in elementary through high school. We are also working on some pretty ambitious new education programs, probably to start in the second half of 2010.

I don't find that I have the same reluctance to support these organizations that I have for most others. Both are doing something that I am passionate about. I have to remember that I have a budget to keep to, before I overcommit to them. It's easy to respond to them when they request my support. And I feel good about it.

There are a huge number of charitable organizations out there. The economy is really having a severe impact on them. I know, most of them seem to be asking for my support. Some of them, I am sure, are doing something that you are passionate about.

Whether your passion is for education, parks, justice, animals, children, or medicine, find one of these organizations and make the choice to support them with your time or your money. Even the smallest support will help them out. You will feel good about your choice and they can certainly use it.

Bob O'Hara

Engineer, volunteer, entrepreneur, and board member of San Jose Jazz

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