**IAF Training in San Antonio (or how I came to recognize the value of intentional organizing)**

**Paul Simon**

 As I’d been told, IAF regional training in San Antonio in November was top-notch. The takeaways all coalesced into a greater understanding of community organizing – the desired result of my commitment to spend the week in a “classroom.”

Dividing the 50 of us into three groups for the duration of the training fostered was a core leadership training in itself. It permitted more informal presentations on key concepts as well as interludes for reading handout material, role-playing and other interactive elements.

The result was a greater clarity, a sort of “what it’s all about,” beyond showing up at a Coloradans for the Common Good meeting, assembly, or collaborative event because it seemed the right thing to do. No matter what direction my fellow participants and I eventually pursue within the IAF framework, we gained greater understanding of IAF’s core principles.

We learned about the different types of power and power politics and in particular about relational power, which is a cornerstone for achieving social change. We heard about the differences in public vs. personal personas and what that means for IAF community leaders; utilizing house meetings to identify problems that might turn into action issues and to unearth potential leaders; and recognizing our self-interests and those of community leaders essential for negotiating for community betterment and long-term cultural change.

Other Insights:

* Relational power requires an ability to change oneself
* A delegate assembly is about internal accountability
* An action, or perhaps an Action, is a major component of community organization, not simply an activity. Actions get reactions. For example, we attended a raucous, rockin’ action in San Antonio with some 400 representatives of nearly 20 Catholic parishes in which the local sheriff and police chief pledged to recognize “parish ID” documents as valid identification for immigrants.
* It’s all about organizing and re-organizing, developing three levels of leaders and enacting appropriate actions. Community organizing requires organized power and organized money

We spent the last night as a group with Ernesto Cortez, the national co-chair of IAF who in 1974 founded Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), one of the oldest and most active local IAF organizations that serves the west and southside San Antonio communities. A fascinating leader, Cortez extolled, cajoled and exhorted us through discussions of culture, leadership, energy-building, the alignment of interest and mission, and making the most of our time.

That last item -- time -- is a bit of sticking point considering my stack of a half dozen books at my bedside that were  recommended by Cortez and other trainers!