

Two Gentlemen

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James Hansen

It was about two decades ago, I think, when Jeff Sachs introduced me to Gerry Lenfest. It was at one of Jeff's big shindigs where he brings in scores of important people from around the world to address big problems, matters that Jeff can somehow speak to eloquently and persuasively, in flawless King's English, developing a complete rational discussion without once looking at notes. This was one fall during that brief interlude between New York's sticky summer and windy winter, so Gerry and I took our sandwiches and sat outside for lunch. Jeff had prompted me that Gerry was one of Columbia's best friends, and I could ask him for support, something that I was not very good at. I wanted to have a workshop on aerosols and climate, including people from physical and health sciences, including especially relevant scientists from China and India, offering to pay travel expenses of participants, so it would be expensive. The problem was that government agencies each would provide, at most, a small amount of money, so I would need to write proposals to several agencies, and they would expect to have some say in the agenda and participants. Gerry sent a gift to Columbia, a check to cover the workshop costs, and a letter of a couple of sentences informing them that the funds were to be used to support my work and Columbia could not use the funds for "overhead" costs other than a small administrative fee.

Every year or two, over the next two decades, whenever I was in trouble, I would go to Gerry. Most commonly it was when I wanted to do something that the government might not like or that tax-payer money should not be spent on. I became aware that right-wing kooks were somehow aware of every little thing I was doing. I had to be certain that any charts or material for presentations that I gave as a private citizen, outside my government job, were prepared by someone who I paid with non-government funds. Gerry even came to my rescue after I prematurely instructed a contractor to replace the bricked in second floor windows of the GISS building (owned by Columbia) with real windows, only to find that the government refused to give post-facto approval for the work. It seemed that the contractor was going to force me to put a bigger mortgage on our house or go to jail. Gerry had begun to force me to find matching funds whenever I had a proposed project – I think he was trying to make me learn how to ask for money – but in this case he overlooked the matching funds requirement. He said that when he was a ne'er-do-well teenager his father sent him to work on an Iowa farm, where he learned how to work and to trust Iowans. He read my Communications and pretended they were difficult for him, joshing that it got him in trouble when he mispronounced 'usufruct'.

Ian Cumming came out of the blue about two years ago. He had also been reading my Communications. We went to lunch at the Symposium, and, not being sensitive to the fact that the two young men accompanying him were Mormon, I ordered a pitcher of sangria. It didn't matter – Ian and I were able to finish it – it's very weak. I was still not good at asking for support, but when Ian brought it up, I told him how much I was short in covering that year's budget. Also, ideally, I would like funding for a post-doc – if I do not stay in the research game it is too easy for grumpy scientists, still sore about my criticism of lethargic ice sheet models (which have suddenly become more mobile) or sludge-bedeveled ocean models (seem to be getting more realistic, but without a good physical explanation of changes, except higher resolution). Ian sent a gift to Columbia that was double what I requested, covering more than half of this year's budget.

That wasn't enough for Ian. He felt an urgency to do something to try to wake up the world to the climate problem. Couldn't we take a group of influential people to Antarctica and show them the matter, persuading them to take some action? I persuaded him that Greenland was a lot closer and we would be able to actually view melting going on, a lot of it. After a while, though, I stopped hearing from Ian's assistants.

Gerry and Ian were two very different people, but both had been very successful in business. Anniek met Gerry once and reminds me of what he said "how can you live with such a possessed man?" In recent years Gerry and Ian resembled each other, both getting craggy, not walking as easily as they used to, but both wanting to do something useful in their old age.

They both died this year. Two very different people. Both will be missed.

It reminds me how little time we have and how difficult it is to do something useful. I am frustrated by the limited progress in achieving effective energy policies, as needed to address climate change. It is shocking to realize that I have been advocating 'fee-and-dividend' for more than a decade and lawsuits against the government for almost a decade. Those two approaches are synergistic, and I think the combination can eventually work, but the wheels of justice are grinding slowly.

So I have another idea that I will describe in an upcoming Communication. I will include this as a chapter in Sophie's Planet, which has to be finished this winter – not only because Anniek will murder me if I don't finish it, but because funding for my group runs out the end of the next spring semester, so I will have to hit the fund-raising trail by then. Any support that helps stretch that date a bit would be much appreciated by me and my team members.

Perhaps the most frustrating thing is the difficulty in communicating with young people. They have so much potential political power. That's one thing I will try to convey in Sophie's Planet and it's a reason that I must finish it this winter – it will be too dated if I don't. The draft preface of the book is available [here](#).