

GM Produces a Maverick

A decidedly unconventional heir to a general Motor's fortune is using his money to stir up Congress, the Pentagon, organized philanthropy, a little of the left, a lot of the right and whatever else seems to need some agitation.

By Timothy Saasta for the Grantsmanship Center News May-August 1978

Suppose for a moment that you had an income of \$1 million a year-not to spend on yourself, but to give away. You could offer friends the potential for realizing their dreams.

You could alleviate the struggles of artists who have not found recognition. You could have an impact on a political campaign. You could help rescue culture for your community.

You could do whatever you wished, provided it were charitable. It must be charitable because that is what your conscience dictates.

If the idea stimulates some thought, you have experienced a bit of power and the glory, and perhaps a hint of the weight, of Stewart Mott-playboy; philanthropist.

Every year Mott gives away a little under a million dollars. But it is not so much the amount he gives away that makes Mott interesting, it is who gets it and how he gives it. And, of course, where it came from.

Mott, whose father was one of the largest shareholders of General Motors, has used his inheritance to support politicians who have most definitely not been the darlings of GM, such as Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern, and to assist organizations that similarly are not GM's favorites, such as Ralph Nader's Center for Law in the Public Interest, the Fund for Peace, the National Women's Political Caucus and the Center for Political Reform. These organizations are typical of the groups Mott supports, which primarily fall into five areas-arms control, population control, governmental reform, economic reform and women's rights.

He describes the major recipients of his money as "very flexible and very topical" and often "very embarrassing to those who abuse the privilege and responsibility of governance." He describes himself as a "junior" grade Ralph Nader or John Gardner. "When asked his profession, he often replies "Maverick."

By themselves, his charities would make Mott suspect, not only in the inner confines of General Motors but also in the genteel gatherings of most philanthropists. His style, however, makes him positively indecorous.

In the grey button-down world of philanthropy, Stewart Mott is a red sombrero.

He lives atop a 16-story Park Avenue apartment building, where he and two employees maintain an organic terrace garden that includes over 400 varieties of vegetables and fruits, nuts and herbs, flowers and trees. His mini-farm, which is tucked into a half of an acre of space with great precision, has perhaps the only chicken coop and compost pile on Park Avenue.

Within this haven, Matt enjoys a bachelor existence, and what is far worse to his fellow philanthropists, he is not at all bashful in talking about it. When the *Washington Post* reported how many women he had been involved with in a year, Mott was indignant-not because they wrote it but because they got the number wrong. "I talk about these matters freely," he says, "and it dismays some people."

Another thing that dismays some people is his flair for self publicity. In 1973, the National Organization for Non-Parents named him non-parent of the year. He was crowned with a laurel wreath and then rode down Fifth Avenue in a horse drawn carriage with the female non-parent of the year. His picture, with his arm draped around his compatriot, found its way into the next morning's *New York Times*.

Last year he celebrated movement into middle age (his 40th birthday) by inviting several hundred friends to a Middle Ages party

complete with food and entertainment of that time. Once again his picture, with him crowned and cloaked in an ermine cape, wound up in print-in Time's "people" section. The accompanying story noted the cost of the extravaganza \$25,000.

The compleat philanthropist

Mott seems to relish nearly all of the publicity, but some of his associates think that, at times, it has had an invidious effect. Anne Zill, Mott's "Washington representative," says that publicity has "occasionally trivialized some of what he has done. If it has trivialized him, the reason is that it focuses attention on one side of Mott-the side that enjoys engaging in a bit off frivolity from time to time. There is also a very serious side, the one that usually dominates when he is working at philanthropy.

He sets high standards for his profession and suggests they should be followed by all philanthropists. What he calls "compleat philanthropists" should devote time to four activities. They should be "businessmen-investors," making sure that income is maximized. They should be "active workers in the administration of the organizations they support." They must be publicists, advocating what they are funding. And finally, they must be involved in politics. "My rule of thumb is that if you are spending \$4 on philanthropy, you should spend a dollar on the political process." You can almost see the circumspect world of philanthropy respond with a collective cringe.

Mott knows that associating the words politics and philanthropy is anathema, so he explains himself. "A lot of people think that politics is a dirty business that it is unseemly to be fighting in town hall for what you want. But many people have begun to awaken to the fact that if they are not in town hall, they don't have a vote.

"I don't think that philanthropy should be just pure and unselfish and unrelated to the rest of reality. It is an integral part of our social fabric.

"Mott is particularly critical of foundation philanthropy. He says that most foundations "are run by octogenarians, men, who are not very close to the reality of where monies are really needed." It is difficult for them to find out about such needs, he says, because they are "constantly hiding under a barrel." As a result, "They ignore the most fundamental questions." Of such words, friends are not made.

Before its recent changes, the epitome of much of what he dislikes about foundations was the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in Flint, Michigan, a foundation founded by his father in 1926 and now the country's twelfth largest, with assets of more than \$350 million. (Altogether, Mott's father amassed a fortune that exceeded half a billion dollars.

Mott's philanthropic career began with the family foundation, which until recently had been committed exclusively to improving community life in Flint. After rejecting engineering (he spent three years at MIT), religion (he spent a year as an acolyte in an Episcopal church in Boston) and comparative literature (he completed course work for a master's degree at Columbia but never finished his paper on the plays of Sophocles, Mott decided that an answer to his search for meaning could be philanthropy.

For a year he worked as an executive trainee in four or the business enterprises his father controlled in order to learn about where

the money came from. A short time later he approached his father with his ideas for reordering the priorities of the Mott Foundation.

His father, who died only five years ago at the age of 97, was not enamored with the plan and refused to appoint Stewart a consultant to the foundation. Their relationship, which had never been close, became even more strained and Stewart, feeling rejected, moved to New York and did not speak to his parents for a year. In New York, he began in earnest the job of giving away his money.

Mott's first philanthropic passion was population control. His involvement with it had started before he came to New York: during his stay in Flint he started a local chapter of Planned Parenthood. But his interest in birth control started even before that.

"At about the time that I was 18," Mott recalls, "I realized that the population explosion and the possibility of nuclear annihilation were the most important problems facing humanity. I decided I wanted to do something about it if I had the chance."

At the time he didn't realize how much of a chance he would have because he had no idea of how much money he would receive." My father did a very poor job of educating us to the notion that we would have a philanthropic career available to us."

In New York, Mott spent a year working as a volunteer fundraiser for Planned Parenthood, raising \$3 million. Altogether he has given nearly \$2 million to various groups concerned with population control, but several years ago he cut back his support because of the influx of government money into the area. Recently he has renewed his funding for groups working to get Congress to support effective population programs.

Mott's other long-term interest—arms control—has been relatively constant. In the '60s and early '70s he was involved in the antiwar movement. Shortly after the war ended he helped start the Fund for Peace, which Mott says has "the audacity to take on the Pentagon, CIA, FBI, State Department and U.S. Congress." The programs that are a part of the Fund for Peace—the Center for Defense Information, Center for National Security Studies, Center for International Policy attempt to provide alternative information and views about defense needs, intelligence requirements and foreign policy. They also challenge what Mott calls "sweetheart contracts" between the Defense Department and private contractors.

A philanthropist goes to Washington

Mott agrees that his focus on arms control and population control is "ambitious considering the limits of my resources," which is why he has chosen to use a good part of his resources to achieve political change. "The less your funds the more you have to figure out how to use them to effect change. I concluded that I had to work affecting policy in Washington."

His initial involvement in politics grew out of his opposition to the Vietnam war. In 1968 he spent \$25,000 for advertisements encouraging Nelson Rockefeller to run as a peace candidate against then President Johnson. Rockefeller ignored his efforts, so Mott redirected his support to Eugene McCarthy, giving his campaign more than \$200,000.

McCarthy's failure to win the Democratic nomination somewhat surprised Mott, who decided he needed to learn more about practical politics, particularly how the nominating process works. He came to understand the importance of the delegate selection process and supported those working to reform that process in the Democratic party.

Those reforms had much to do with George McGovern's nomination in 1972. In the early stages of that year's presidential campaign, Mott supported three candidates—McGovern, McCarthy and John Lindsay. At one point he proposed that the three combine forces, with McGovern running for President, Lindsay for Vice President (but with control of the Labor Department, HUD and HEWI) and McCarthy to be made Secretary of State. Needless to say, his idea did not generate much enthusiasm.

Mott eventually settled on McGovern and became his biggest contributor, donating more than \$400,000. His political expenditures for the year exceeded \$700,000. Some of that went to a rather scurrilous ad campaign he conducted against Edmund Muskie, an activity that led to his appearance before the Senate Watergate Committee, which was investigating political "dirty tricks." The committee found that Mott had properly signed all of his missives.

Mott's political giving was sharply curtailed by Congress' passage in 1974 of the campaign reform laws, which put a \$1,000 limit on what an individual can give to a candidate and a \$25,000 limit on giving to all candidates.

Partially as a result, Mott directed more money to organizations that work to change the political process. He helped start the Fund for Constitutional Government, which, in his words, is "a public-interest law group which takes on the White House, Congress, agencies, the Pentagon and any department of government in which we think we can find a solid case of the corrupt use of power and politics." One of the Fund's activities was a suit which disclosed that some hefty political contributions from the dairy industry were followed by a hefty increase in milk price supports by the Nixon Administration. The Fund lost the case however; it won one to obtain public ownership of Nixon's tapes.

Mott has given support to several other groups working for political change, including the Women's Campaign Fund, the National Committee for an Effective Congress, Common Cause and New Directions ("an international Common Cause"). In 1973 he financed *The Offenses of Richard M. Nixon*, a case for impeachment prepared by four Washington lawyers. He also helps the Fund for Constitutional Government co-publisher of the popular *Almanac of American Politics*, which he modestly dubs the "best reference book about the House and Senate that has ever been published."

Action yes, theory no

He has focused so much on politics because he thinks change in the people running the government is essential to change in society. "A lot of essential legislation can get passed when we have a more flexible Congress that is younger and more alert."

Such an approach to fostering change might be called systemic in that it involves changing a system (Congress) rather than changing individual products of that system (laws). But Mott is not consistent in his ideas about achieving change, and he doesn't particularly care about his consistency, saying he is "short on theories and long on action."

He denies that systemic change is what is needed in the areas of arms and population control. The key to achieving population control is delivering contraceptives, he says, which "produces fewer births than any amount of Barry Commoner's yak yak yak. I get fed up to my teeth when I hear them talk about raising socioeconomic standards as a first step towards population control. That is a communist attitude—I'm not calling him a communist, but they coincide there."

Mott's approach to arms control is similar. "I don't think of the process by which the U.S. has become such an important military arsenal since WWII as part of a system. It's been apolitical epoch as a consequence of the McCarthy years and the cold war." The way to change this is through education, Mott believes.

He told a *Fortune* reporter that he believed in "chipping away at the defects in the present system without attempting to change the way it fundamentally works."

Mott's assistant, Anne Zill, says that, "You could interpret some of what he does as very conservative. It is not really so inconsistent with what his father was known for." Zill, who is also the chairperson of the Women's Campaign Fund, adds that she would like Mott to be "less hesitant about stating his philosophy and think more about it," but she also defends his ideas.

"I think he is trying to be realistic. The people who say they are radicals and want to overhaul the entire system have a very difficult job. It's much easier to have realistic sights and I think Stewart does."

Sanitary giving?

Mott's approach to change is one of the factors that set him apart from a group of philanthropists one would assume he would be involved with—the offspring of other wealthy families who have also elected to give at least some of their inheritance to progressive causes. Foundations like Vanguard in San Francisco, Haymarket in Boston and Liberty Hill in Los Angeles, which were formed by such individuals (see page 471, give most of their money to local, grass roots groups working to change the power relationships in their communities. Unlike Mott, they ask the community to make decisions about how the money is distributed.

Mott doesn't think much of the results. "Frankly, I think the work I have been doing is so much more challenging and interesting and has so much more impact on the quality of national life than what Vanguard and Haymarket are doing. I don't want to knock them for being irrelevant. What they are doing is of interest to them. It is very tangible. But I wish that some of that ilk would try to get a handle on the national quality of life, if you will or the scene in Washington.

They would probably respond by wishing he would try to get a handle on the quality of life in the Bronx or in Bedford-Stuyvesant. From Mott's 16th story garden, the harsh side of New York is considerably muted. And his giving doesn't attempt to confront those harsh realities.

The realities much of it does confront—the pernicious effects of overpopulation and the potential horrors of nuclear annihilation—are ugly. But his giving never really touches those problems directly; it is, in many respects, quite sanitary. His money supports organizations consisting mostly of relatively well-to-do people, most of them white. And while they are all committed to change, they nevertheless form very definite elite.

Mott knows the criticism; he anticipates the questions. He says the importance of controlling births and arms is not perceived by most people, including other philanthropists, most of whom accept "conventional definitions of philanthropic needs." He implies that the very fact that the problems are distant from most people's lives causes them to be ignored.

"By and large this country looks after its own. Not everybody. But it looks after Uncle Sam's charges first.

"I am removed from those other needs. I'm in my ivory tower, if you like. I'm working on some things that unfortunately the mass of fellow Americans don't seem to care about. But by God they ought to be damn grateful that I and a few thousand other Americans are concerned with them."

A sycophantish world

The emotion of his words suggests how sensitive the issue is to Mott. He lives a life that most people would be envious of, but the envy may preclude one from seeing that being fated to be rich also has its frustrations. There will always be a line drawn between you and certain experiences. There will always be those who say you cannot fully understand without those experiences.

Mott often talks about the year he spent traveling around the world—he spent but \$1,500. But he knows living with-out for a time is not spending your time without.

And not only does fated wealth deny certain experiences, it distorts other experiences. It affects relationships. It immerses you in a sycophantish world, a world of people who, perhaps, want something from you. In telling the *Washington Post* that political candidates seeking money often fawn over him, he described the typical attitude of someone who wants something from someone else. They are likely to have, he said, "a deferential, particularly agreeable attitude: Mott mentioned that

he has "shied away" from the term philanthropist because of the way people react to it. "They feel it is a general term for sugar daddy."

Constant exposure to such attitudes has an effect, as Mott noted it did on his father. "The praise that my father got as he walked the streets of Flint was very reinforcing and very self-perpetuating."

Wealth and change

But there are other reasons for the criticism of Mott besides the mere fact of his wealth and its effects. Many of his ideas about wealth and its place in society, and many of the ways he uses his wealth, estrange him from at least some fellow advocates of change.

Mott struggles to change the political process, yet what many have seen as a major problem with that process—the influence of big political donors—has never troubled him. He called the campaign reform law ceilings on how much an individual donor could give "preposterous" and a "sham," and he has worked to have them changed. He acknowledges that his contributions buy access to politicians, but he denies that that is his purpose in making them. He contends that people who have the time to work as a volunteer in a political campaign have similar "undue influence"—more than one person, one-vote influence—on the outcome of an election.

Taxation is another sensitive area. An often-cited cause of many socioeconomic problems is the inequity of the tax system, which allows many of the rich to avoid paying an appropriate share of taxes. Mott, by making investments that allow him to deduct large interest payments and, of course, by making deductible charitable contributions, usually pays little or nothing in taxes. He agrees that society couldn't function "if everybody elected their own way of providing for public needs," but he says that he is "simply taking advantage of existing tax laws."

Few would disagree that minimizing taxes through charitable deductions is far less offensive than doing so by buying up farmland in the Imperial Valley. But then, almost gratuitously, he added a bromide that seemed to say a little more than he intended: "We all know that economic differences will persist."

Another criticism of Mott's wealth concerns how he invests it. The *Fortune* article on him pointed out that, despite his advocacy of gun control, he had invested in a company that manufactures handguns. Very recently, Ralph Nader chided Mott for advocating an increase in price supports for sugar growers, pointing out that Mott is a director of the U.S. Sugar Company and that his family owns 23 percent of the company. Mott subsequently "elaborated" his position on the issue, though he denied that Nader's criticism had anything to do with it.

To cite the obvious, there is a strong strain of individualism in Mott, probably another inheritance from his father. He told *Fortune* that he advocated "individual initiative and private enterprise." His giving is done as an individual because he believes "you can get more creativity out of individuals than you can out of committees." He started a foundation in the '60s, but he says that "the restrictions of having to work with a board of directors and the Tax Reform Act of 1969 which made it more advantageous to give as an individual led me to abandon it." However, when he lists the things he looks at in an organization asking for money, one of the most prominent is whether there is a board of directors "monitoring whatever it is doing."

Mott believes strongly in openness, he practices it, he says that foundations need to open up their funding process to public scrutiny, yet he opposes any suggestion that openness be made mandatory. Instead, he says, the wealthy should be "encouraged" to reveal what they are doing with their money. "I wouldn't feel comfortable if I was forced to."

Another frequent criticism of traditional philanthropy is that it is not responsive enough, yet Mott initiates "80 to 90 percent" of his gifts, seldom responding positively to a proposal. He explains: "I don't

think everybody can be an initiator. There aren't that many creative people around."

Zill, however, thinks criticism that her boss is too individualistic is unwarranted. "He is a part of the boards of many organizations that he funds, and he certainly does not agree with everybody. But he has to deal with their wishes. He is subjecting himself to a group decision in the areas he is interested in."

Another difference between the other radical rich philanthropists and Mott is how they relate to the accoutrements of their wealth. Most of the former actively work at toning down their lifestyles. Mott, for the most part, does not. Perhaps he could be called a Robin Hood who works on commission.

Mott drives a car that some of the finer restaurants in New York would frown upon parking for him, and he often avoids those finer restaurants, but in other ways he doesn't deny himself too much. According to his accountant, he spent an average of about \$50,000 a year on his upkeep between 1971 and 1973. That is not much considering his resources. But it is a small fortune considering the incomes of most of those with which he shares New York.

Mott is very definite in expressing who he is and doing what he likes, which causes many people to form very definite impressions of him—some very positive, some very negative.

One of the people who has received funds from Mott, a person that respects his philanthropy very much, says that he "suffers from several of the defects of the rich. He's very self centered. He can be quite insensitive considering how bright he is. I have seen him be both very kind and absolutely cruel."

Another person whose organization has received funds from the tune of \$355,000).

In 1977, for example, Mott had an adjusted gross income of \$1,960,976 virtually all of it from dividends on General Motors stock in four trusts of which he is income beneficiary. Of that amount, he gave \$1,016,985—or slightly more than 50 percent—to charitable causes (he can deduct only 50 percent for tax purposes, but the excess \$36,000 or so can be applied to the following year's taxes). This amount included \$274,000 to the Fund for Constitutional Government (which Mott created as a watchdog for government corruption), \$81,000 to the Fund for Peace, \$152,000 to Planned Parenthood, \$15,000 to the Abortion Counseling Service, \$9,000 to the Zero Population Growth Foundation, \$10,000 to Amnesty International, \$15,830 to the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, \$12,000 to the Population Institute, \$15,000 to the Center for the Study of Non-Medical Drug Use, \$20,000 to the Citizen's Research Foundation, \$46,000 to the Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at City College of New York, \$22,000 to New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine, \$5,000 to the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington and \$6,000 to the National Organization for Non-Parents.

In addition to his charitable giving, Mott contributed \$52,931 to political causes in 1977 (a non-election year). He also spent more than \$300,000 operating what amount to two personal philanthropic offices in New York, one of them in his apartment. And he paid \$189,227 in income taxes. Subtract all these beneficences from Mott's adjusted gross income and you'll find that multimillionaire Stewart Mott had only a few hundred thousand for himself in 1977, of which he appears to have spent less than \$100,000.

"I always ask myself, 'If I didn't have all this money, could I be earning the equivalent of what I spend on myself, or am I living beyond my hypothetical means?'" Mott once told an interviewer. He concluded that as a professional fund-raiser he could probably draw a salary equivalent to what he spends on himself. "When I tell myself that, it reassures me that I'm not a leech on society." To some extent Mott deludes himself on this point: His accountant indicates that Mott does in fact spend a good deal more on himself than he'd be able to make as a salaried fundraiser. Still, even \$100,000 a year is a modest standard of

living for a person of Mott's means; on Park Avenue, it puts him barely above the subsistence level.

Mott couldn't care less; his devotion to his philanthropic lifestyle is strikingly single-minded. He throws or co-hosts a dozen or so parties a year (twice as many in an election year), but nearly all are fund-raising events for his pet causes. His longest vacation in 1978 was one week, although he confesses to taking frequent three-day weekends ("my best outlet for unwinding"). Even love and marriage take a back seat to charity in the Mott household. "I don't especially wish to get married," he once said, "because that could lead to divorce and alimony and property settlements, and I'd like to keep my assets unencumbered for charity. As for my having children, that would constitute a statement of affirmation about our planet, and I'm not optimistic about our prospects. I can't feel that the world I'd be presenting a child with is one I could be proud of. Of course, if I were living with a woman, and it was important for her to achieve self-identity through maternity, I'd probably yield to her desires, but I would certainly draw the line at having more than two children."

Few people are so presumptuous as to describe themselves as philanthropists, but in Mott's case the label is an understatement, for Mott is much more. He is really a one-man foundation—a tireless fund-raiser, coordinator, board member and party-thrower for causes he supports. His 20-room Washington "mini-mansion," next to the Supreme Court building on Capitol Hill, is now largely occupied by staffers of the Fund for Peace, which coordinates studies related to U.S. security policy, and the Fund for Constitutional Government, which sues government agencies to achieve internal reforms; Mott is a founder and principal angel of both groups. He has successfully challenged the federal election regulation law, claiming that he had a constitutional right to spend more than the allowable \$1,000 per candidate (the Supreme Court struck down some of the provisions, but Mott remains dissatisfied with the law as it stands). His Mott Enterprises Inc. provides direct-mail consultation and services for non-profit groups. Mott himself personally acts as an informal editor and critic for publications of the groups with which he is involved. And he is an active board member (in some cases chairman) of some dozen organizations."

"One gets a sense of *deja vu* as one sees the same personnel problems, the same role definition problems recurring from one organization to the next," Mott acknowledges. But he maintains his peripatetic memberships because "there are so few people who interconnect as I do. I usually come to a board meeting with an agenda of my own. I usually find something to speak up about. I have a reputation as an *enfant terrible*." The notion seems to please him.

As the *Harvard Political Review* observed in a 1976 article about Mott, American millionaires have customarily followed one of two traditions: the rockbound, conservative, self-oriented businessman or the benevolent but uninvolved philanthropist. Mott has departed from both traditions—he is neither conservative nor uninvolved—so perhaps it is not surprising that he has also departed from the standard image of the millionaire as troubled and guilt-ridden.

Mott's good-works career can be traced back to the mid-1960s. After teaching English for a year at Eastern Michigan University, he quit with a public declaration (nearly all of Mott's declarations are public) that the faculty had an intolerable workload. He returned to his hometown of Flint, Michigan, and, while casting about for something to do, discovered that there was no Planned Parenthood branch in Flint—so he set one up. He obtained 500 birth-control kits from a manufacturer of contraceptives, passed out 40,000 flyers announcing their availability, hired a trailer and gave out kits to passers-by in low-income neighborhoods.

Planned Parenthood's national headquarters, impressed by Mott's missionary zeal as well as his checkbook, began dispatching Mott to other cities. Soon he was attending birth control meetings in London and Geneva and became one of Planned Parenthood's major supporters. From there it was a logical step to such causes as abortion law reform, the peace movement and reform politics.

Mott's rapid rise in the philanthropic world can be attributed to his unique combination of money and genes—both, ironically, things which he has inherited from the most frequent target of his criticism: his late father, Charles S. Mott. The elder Mott began manufacturing wheels and axles around the turn of the century; in 1906 he moved his company from Utica, New York, to Flint, Michigan, to capitalize on the rapid growth of the auto industry. By 1913 Charles had sold the company to the newly created General Motors Corporation, largely for G.M. stock, and Charles became a G.M. director—a position he held for 60 years until his death in 1973 at the age of 97. He left a family fortune worth some \$200 to \$300 million in addition to the Charles S. Mott Foundation, today the eighth largest in the nation, with assets worth about \$500 million.

While he was piling up a major fortune, the elder Mott also accumulated four wives and six children. Charles was 62 years old by the time the fifth of his children, Stewart, came along in 1937 (indeed, Charles was 67 when he fathered his last child). The double generation gap separating father from son, together with the elder Mott's standoffish manner, created a chasm of immense proportions. The father signed notes to his son, "Very truly yours, C.S. Mott"; when it came time for Stewart to learn to ride a bicycle, his parents hired someone to teach him; when Stewart, in his 20s, demanded a heart-to-heart talk with his father, the father scheduled an appointment at the General Motors Building in New York and met Stewart across a conference table.

Frustrated and anxious to assert himself, Stewart went public with his complaints about his father, creating a field day for the mass media and considerable embarrassment for his family. In a newsletter mailed out to hundreds of his friends, Stewart once described Charles as "my zoo-keeper father"; on another occasion he called the activities of his father's foundation "outrageous" because it rarely concerned itself with problems outside the city limits of Flint. And while Stewart is doubtless glad to be alive, he often says that he resents that his father waited so long to have him.

"I heartily disbelieve in having children after the age of 50," he says today. "It's just a macho thing, so you can boast to our friends about your paternity."

Actually, Stewart's complaints about his conservative father were not all that different from those of other rebellious sons and daughters who came of age during the tempestuous 1960s. The problem was that Stewart had a much older father than his contemporaries did. "I can understand Stewart's frustrations," his half-brother Harding Mott told *The New Yorker* a few years ago. "But Stewart is still sometimes a little rough on Dad, considering his age. After all, it's hard to ask a man to change his habits at 96."

The elder Mott, for his part, tried to take Stewart's criticisms in stride. "I refuse to argue with Stewart on anything, so we get along all right," he once said. On another occasion, though, he commented that Stewart "has twice the brains I have, but only half the common sense." And when a television interviewer once asked Charles what he thought of Stewart's philanthropic activity, he replied succinctly, "It's for the birds."

On the surface, much of Stewart Mott's life appears to be a repudiation of all that his father stood for. Charles Mott belonged to the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Kiwanis, Rotary, the Elks, the Moose and the Masons. Stewart was a conscientious objector and is affiliated with the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, Planned Parenthood, the Abortion Rights Association, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, the American Schizophrenia Foundation and the National Sex and Drug Forum. The father was an unabashed booster of General Motors and all its products; the son drives a beat-up Volkswagen when he drives at all; more often he rides around New York on a moped, and his preferred means of transportation is a non-polluting ordinary bicycle ("the only trouble with a push-bike is that in the summer you arrive at your destination hot and sweaty").

Obviously it tickles Stewart to be upsetting the establishment—his father's establishment as much as he believes he is. But there are actually striking similarities between conservative father and progressive son. Both have been iconoclasts and rugged individualists, each in his own way. Charles Mott became mayor of Flint long before political activity was fashionable for major corporation executives and, like Stewart, he challenge do others of his class to follow his lead. A 1923 magazine article acclaimed Charles Mott as "a new type of citizen ... being evolved in America," which is precisely how Stewart likes to think of himself today. That article was accompanied by a box containing Charles Mott's pointers for would-be enlightened executives, just as this article is accompanied by some of Stewart Mott's didactic lessons for would-be enlightened philanthropists. Indeed, when Stewart came across the 1923 article about his father he was so intrigued that he sent copies to the hundreds on his mailing list, with a handwritten cover letter which puckishly observed: "What a curious fellow, this Mott! A business man, public servant, philanthropist, farmer, sometimes athlete. He's the sort of fellow one might want to recruit for politics or nonprofit organizations.... He seems to have a no nonsense approach and likes to achieve, get things done. He's got \$\$\$ + brains + goodwill + curiosity + unlimited energies. But maybe he'd rather just live in Flint, Mich. and tend to his local duties...? We may be 52 years too late, but should we try to recruit him?"

A family friend observes, "Stewart's father was unable to relate to the 1960s or 1970s, but Stewart has been equally incapable of relating to the world his father grew up in. Stewart is like the fellow in the joke who says, 'When I was 16 I thought my father was an idiot; when I was 20 I was amazed at how much he had learned in four years.' Stewart is just beginning to appreciate that his father, in his own time and his own way, was every bit as innovative and unconventional as Stewart is."

Despite their public disagreements, Stewart and his father had touching moments of reconciliation. In 1969, for example, Stewart took over the Tavern on-the-Green in Central Park to throw a party for his father's 94th birthday. Before 420 guests, including Mayor Lindsay and the chairman of General Motors, Stewart recited a poem he had written which is notable for its sentiments if not for its meter:

For you to rear such a child as me/Has not been full of fun and glee-/Your progeny surely you sometimes rue./About choices and actions we each pursue,/ In politics, religion and philanthropy, / We rarely, if ever, come to agree.

Today, Stewart says, he maintains friendly relations with his mother and siblings. "My mother still cringes when I talk openly about the differences between me and father, or about my sexual life," he says, "but I think that's basically a generation thing."

Any reading of Stewart Mott's public comments, his privately circulated newsletters or articles about him (including, one fears, this one) usually leaves the impression that the man has a couple of screws missing. On the contrary, in person Stewart Mott comes across as eminently sane and reasonable, as well as good natured and unassuming. Which is not to say that he isn't unique, for who else on this planet conceives of himself as a public institution? Doubtless he would have turned out differently had he not (a) inherited a fortune and (b) had a father 62 years his senior. But then he would not have been Stewart Mott.

"I feel that those who have power and wealth in society are more accountable than others," he says, by way of explaining his excessive candor. "The law requires that foundations be accountable to the public. I've chosen to do so voluntarily. But I wouldn't insist that everyone do the same."

Mott would like very much to be not quite as unique as he is. He often talks of some day launching a campaign to recruit rich young people like himself for philanthropy; just the way corporations and law firms now recruit. "I'd like to get together with them and talk about the joy of a career in philanthropy," he says. "The cutoff would be people with a \$200,000 annual income. There must be a thousand or two thousand people, age 20 to 30, who fit that description. Sure, it's tough to

identify them, but you can find out through word of mouth and discreet inquiry."

Some wealthy scions have already moved in Mott's direction. Members of the Rockefeller family's fourth generation, for example, have supported causes like ecology and feminism and have challenged their parents' more conservative institutions. Two sons of Seward Johnson (of Johnson & Johnson) are key supporters of foundations fighting against pollution of the oceans. Ted Pillsbury, of the flour and foods family, has backed a number1 of progressive candidates and causes.

But most heirs must do their good works through a family foundation, where a young innovator constitutes merely one vote out of many (if he or she is able to get on the board at all). Stewart Mott appeared headed in much the same direction not too long ago: In 1965 he asked his father to add some younger blood Stewart's own, for example-to the Charles S. Mott Foundation board, and he also suggested that the huge foundation pay less attention to projects in Flint and more to population control, arms control and other international concerns.

His father rejected the proposal. Stewart, furious, moved to New York, setup his own much smaller philanthropic operation there and did not speak to his father for a year. When Charles Mott died in 1973, the Mott Foundation chose as his successor on the board not Stewart, but Stewart's younger sister, Marianne Meynet of Santa Barbara, California.

For some time after the break with his father, Stewart clung to the notion that some day he would return in prodigal triumph to take charge of the Charles Mott Foundation and its \$500 million in assets. By now, though, that scenario is unlikely, and Stewart seems to feel that his exclusion from his father's foundation was for the best. "It left me free to pursue my work in peace and population," Stewart says today, "so I'm not terribly disappointed. I wonder how Marianne sustains interest in projects in Flint."

The French actress Jeanne Moreau recently observed that "it is not the rich who are powerful; it is the people who feel themselves free." Stewart Mott, who is both rich *and* free-spirited, would certainly agree. "My definition of success," he remarks, "is finding what you most want to do, so that your work eight hours a day corresponds to your physical and emotional ideas. That connection is much more important than wealth, power or prestige. I come across far too many people in their 20s and 30s who are floundering because they haven't made that connection. I'm happy beyond words that I have."