

JIM ANDERSON

The people's advocate

BY MYRLA MAGNESS ■ CONTRIBUTING WRITER

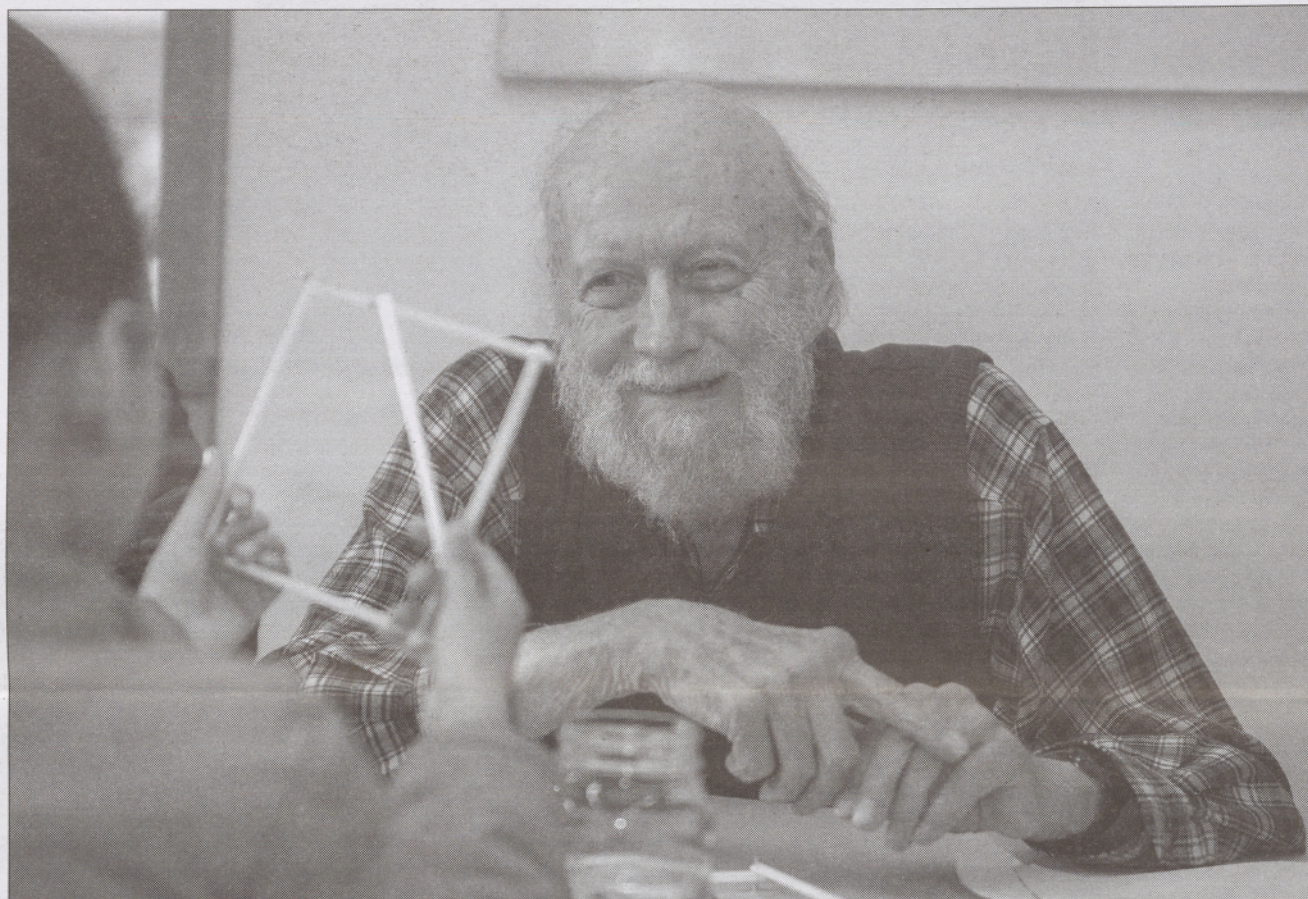


PHOTO BY DIEGO DIAZ

A simple wooden cross hangs around the neck of Jim Anderson, a tall and lanky Pete Seeger lookalike who is now 88. "I hope the Mexicans will win the Mexican American war on poverty," he announces as we begin. It takes me a few minutes to catch on: his sense of humor is another aspect of his modesty. As we get into our conversation, I see that not only does Jim hope, but he has a lifetime of actively helping people improve their chances of getting a job.

He had a privileged childhood but, like many sensitive children, he felt the sting of inequality and segregation. When his family moved to the Philippines in 1934 for his father's work in international trade, 7-year-old Jim was sent to an exclusive school. For recreation, he went to an all-white American polo club where local people were excluded from membership, but hired to be servants.

"At Catholic Mass, I listened carefully to Gospel stories, the only part of the adult services then in English," he says. "I didn't think Jesus would approve of the ways brown people were treated."

In the spring of 1941, the family moved back to the States, and by the end of that year, the U.S. was at war. Eager to help "stop Hitler," Jim enlisted in the Army at 17.

While still in basic training, Jim joined the Young Christian Workers, a Roman Catholic movement. But before he could be sent

abroad, Japan surrendered, and Jim was assigned to be an instructor at Fort Lewis to train service members in military regulations.

After discharge, he went to Stanford University on the GI Bill, earning a Bachelor of Science in industrial engineering in 1950. A job with Crown Zellerbach brought him to Portland. Ten years later and living in Tigard, Jim was

NOTHING
makes me **MORE**
HOPEFUL
than discovering
another human being to admire.
— ALICE WALKER —

hired on with Tektronix.

In Washington County, he was appointed to the Community Action Board for the War on Poverty, working with unemployed farmworkers.

"The Democratic Party chose me because they knew it was an interest of mine," Jim

tells me, then quotes Paulo Freire:

"Whatever the poor want, figure out a way to do it." One of his tasks was to audit Title I in the school system, and he made a disappointing discovery.

"Instead of helping the kids who were behind, the money went into the general fund and helped the kids who were already ahead."

When he reported this, his contact at Washington County told him, "Every district is doing this and there's nothing we can do about it."

The Community Action Board also served as an umbrella for the Valley Migrant League.

"Here's where the Mexican American War comes in," Jim says, now serious.

"There was a woman named, Ruby Ely, head of the Hillsboro office, who organized a feisty Latino club, called Viva, with help from American Friends, the Communist Party and me. Viva members wanted to

About 20 years ago, as Alberta was gentrifying, he became aware that developers were driving through the neighborhood, scouting out locations on which they might build, then reporting the existing home to the city as a property that should be checked for potential code violations. These were often old homes owned by elderly people who didn't have the means to make repairs.