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# Facing Neighborhoods: Dale's Story

Dale Richardson

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STORYTELLER: Dale Richardson

One night I came home and got into bed and my wife tapped me on my shoulder and said, "Mister, if you see my husband, tell him his wife and kids would like to see him."

I always tried to be in as many places as I could and talk to as many people as I could. I really wanted to make an impression and would go any place, anytime. I wouldn't and I couldn't say no to anything.

There was an ad in the paper one day for Channel 22 that said, "If any community member wants to do editorials on the newscast, contact us." So, I did that for about 7 years. I wasn't a celebrity, but people knew me. I'd go in a restaurant and people would say, "I know you!" People got to know who I was in the city, not that I was looking for any attention.

**MADDEN HILLS**



Then the factory went out. Child Services came around, and hired me as a recruiter for Foster and Adoptive Homes. They said, “Do you know the community?”

*Like the back of my damn hand!*

I was just a guy doing stuff. I would go around and give people the information needed on fostering and adopting children; I wanted to saturate the community with information. I’m very proud of the work I did. I made public presentations to every municipality in the county. I would just go in front of their commissions and tell them that there is a need. Not to make them become foster and adoptive parents, but just to give them the information. I hate that heavy-handed approach.

I was a recruiter for 33 years at children services. I had to retire at 68 because of my knee. Now my knee is better and I regret that I retired, but I try and go back as often as I can.

There was a guy the other day, Don, who’d been married for 52 years, and I said, “Congratulations!” And he responded, “Congratulations,

for what?!” And I knew what he meant. I won’t say it’s a grind, but it’s a struggle. Now I’m not a marriage counselor or anything. But you have to overlook some things. You make that commitment. I believe you have to give it everything you got.

But ... a man, if he has potential he’s worth it. You have to work with potential and that’s all my wife did. We’ve been married for 49 years. Without her I’d be the guy on the side of the road with a sign saying, ‘Homeless, will work for food.’

Now, for what it’s worth, I volunteer at the VA in the hospice and nursing home every Wednesday. **THEY HAVE A PROGRAM CALLED ‘NO VET DIES ALONE’ WHERE VOLUNTEERS SIT WITH VETERANS IN THEIR LAST MOMENTS.** But going into a stranger’s room at that time in their life can be ... awkward and uncomfortable. I was a stranger to them. The VA would call me and it felt too much like an assignment, I wanted it to be a lot more natural. So, now I’m allowed to roam around and talk and sit with people. It is an honor and a privilege

that I have permission to be in that room with a vet. I have heard amazing stories about what the men have gone through—hellacious fights and ambushes. But I also talk to the families, the kids, when they visit. It just makes me so very proud to be an American.

Now I talk a lot. I was talkin’ to one guy—he’s passed away now—and he looked at me and said, “Why don’t you shut up? You talk all the damn time!” Because that’s what you think you need to do, is talk and be engaging. He said “Why don’t we just sit here and enjoy ourselves in the quietness. Just keep me company.”

In retirement, I’m vice president, which is more title than anything, of an advocacy group called the Latino Connection. It’s been around for ten, fifteen, maybe twelve years. The group brings together as many community organizations as we can—you know, the RTA, banks, police and fire departments—to talk about issues that affect the Latino population. We have speakers come in and talk about these things to county commissioners and such. Bring awareness. So if the banks had

job openings, maybe they could offer the jobs to migrants, which pushes to help them work in fair conditions.

**YOU NEED OTHER PEOPLE. YOU DON’T DO THINGS BY YOURSELF IN THIS WORLD. STAND UP FOR FOLKS, IF YOU THINK SOMETHING IS WRONG, IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMETHING.** Share as much as you can and learn from one another. The key is neighbors need to look out for one another. We need to talk and we need to have dialogue. I’m 71 years old, and I swear to you, I feel so stupid in life right now. Because you operate under a lot of assumptions throughout your life, but when you get to know people you find out it’s not the way you thought they were. You cannot stay static; you have to always continue to learn.

Atlanta, Georgia, used to have a slogan: “The city too busy to hate.”

*That’s who I want to be.*

**I WANT TO BE A MAN TOO BUSY TO HATE.**