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Sharon's Story: Pave the Way

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MACFARLANE

The bus will let them off in the back and they'll come running in here with their little backpacks. You'll hear them singing, and you'll hear them talking, laughing.

I met Father Hoelle, that's really how I got here.

I met Father Hoelle, our founder, while I was working for the city of Dayton. That's when I got involved in the neighborhood—it was going through a kind of decline. And it was during this time that Father Hoelle was looking for some help with the Center. He told me there was a vacancy with the executive director and asked me if I would temporarily fill the spot. He assumed I would be retiring soon.

I laughed and said, "No, I'm at retirement age, but I don't want to retire right now. I want



to wait a few more years”. And he just kept ... he would say, “Okay, okay. But the Lord told me ya know...” and I’m like, “Eh, I don’t know ...” I told him I’d think about it.

So, needless to say I thought about it and I said yes to Father Hoelle. He was a person that you just could not say no to. I mean he had a way of twisting your arm with kindness and with love—you know you always wanted to say yes to him. He was such a wonderful person. I contribute all of my dedication and my passion to the love that he had—not only for this neighborhood, for this center, for service. He had such a passion for it and it just resonated in his spirit every time you talked to him. He was always asking about how the community was. He’d ask, “How are they? Because this is their center, it belongs to them.” He always would tell me, “Sharon, whatever you can do, make sure they know it belongs to them.” From the time he started this center in 1965 until the day he died in 2005, he lived the community, he lived service, he lived helping people. I mean, that spirit, for

anyone that knew him, that spirit would kinda float over on you. You know? I can’t describe it. It was such a magnitude of giving and of love. It really was.

OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM HAS BEEN REBUILDING THE COMMUNITY. YOU KNOW, WHEN YOU TEAR SOMETHING DOWN AND YOU DON’T HAVE ANOTHER PLAN, THEN YOU’VE GOT A BROWN SPACE. When you continue to get more and more brown spaces, then it looks like a desert over here. You know a few houses here a few houses there. It’s not cohesive; it’s not a real neighborhood. Those brown areas are where they have torn down houses. Now when you drive through this neighborhood, you just see a lot of space—with nothing but empty lots.

We have to equip the youth with some of the knowledge to be able to handle these problems. I just look at some of the young people that have come through here and how the center changed their lives. I look at it as not only change, but stability. It gave them a place to come to—a safe place, like Father Hoelle wanted. A place

where they could find themselves. They could build character. This is our mission—building character, connecting community. And now they are out there changing, the world for the better, filling the brown spaces with love and ambitions. That’s been the happiest moments of my time here at the center. Holding on to this dream that Father Hoelle wanted—that’s what makes me happy.

I THINK THAT IT’S IMPORTANT THAT ALL OF US REMEMBER, ESPECIALLY MY GENERATION, THAT SOMEONE PAVED THE WAY FOR US, SO WE SHOULD PAVE THE WAY FOR THEM. I have to make sure that you understand that it’s not gonna be easy, and it’s not instant; it’s a continuous work. I’m continuously working now. I’m continuously on the phone. I’m continuously emailing. I’m continuously communicating with other people about what we need to do to continue on with the work that we’re doing. It’s a continuous job and we have to equip you. If we don’t, we’re not doing our job. My job is to empower others so that they can do their best. I don’t feel like my

job is complete unless you’re better when you leave here. I don’t want you to leave here worse; I want you to leave here better. That’s the way I feel about our young generation. They have to be able to lead, and they can’t lead if we don’t show them how to lead.

Little did Father Hoelle know I’d still be here, at the Dakota Center, seventeen years later. And when the bus lets them off in back and they come running ... that’s how I know my seventeen years here have been worthwhile. Not only have I done what I wanted to do, but I did what Father Hoelle wanted. I made sure that the people who came here felt safe, secure, and I made sure we empowered them to be better.