

## Story of Service: Myrtle Hendricks-Corrales

In 1968, my husband, Bill, and I returned to the United States after living in Argentina for a year. We returned young 22- and 23-year-olds changed by our experience, no longer so inner directed and so unaware of the needs of others.

My first job was with the American Psychological Association as a writer/editor of professional psychological journals. When given the choice of working a 38-hour week in four days as opposed to 5, I seized the opportunity. For two years, until the 5-day work week was re-instituted, I volunteered every Friday at the National Children Center, located at that time in Takoma Park, Maryland. I worked with children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I did not have the skills of the professional staff, but the staff was very patient and taught me the skills needed to help the children. I believe I learned more and was given more from these special students than I could ever give to them.

My real service began in 1974 when I resigned from my position at APA to be a fulltime mother. I joined PAX in 1976 and became aware of numerous social action groups and opportunities. I became friends with Ed and Kathleen Guinan who founded the Center for Creative Non-Violence. Kathleen asked me and Margaret Schellenberg to request PAX to provide sandwiches to be disbursed to people as they left the Zacchaeus soup kitchen (one of the many services provided to the homeless by the Center for Creative Nonviolence.) Of course, PAX generously responded with loaves and loaves of sandwiches which Margaret and I took to Zacchaeus. We collected the sandwiches on Sundays after Mass and took them down to Zacchaeus Monday mornings. This schedule work out nicely since Margaret and I also went to Ottenberg Bakery behind Catholic University every Monday to collect the week supply of bread for Zacchaeus.

With my two sons, Bill (age 5), Peter (age 3), and Margaret's daughter, Marissa (age 3), we drove to the Ottenbergs' with large lawn leaf bags in hand. We entered the back of the bakery to a large bin full of bread, bread either rejected by the bakery or returned from stores. The bin was enormous, full of pounds and pounds of bread loaves. We filled 10-15 bags with this bread and delivered the bread and the sandwiches to the Zacchaeus Soup kitchen. Of course, Margaret and I explained to our children what we were doing and why it was so important. I was gratified one day when Peter asked: "With so many people needing food and hungry, why is this bread being thrown away? If we didn't crawl over the bin, the bread would not be food for anyone?" Of course, Peter's question led to a great discussion. My sons to this day remember our weekly runs to the bakery and soup kitchen. This experience began my sons' worldview that we have a responsibility to promote the welfare of humanity.

PAX continued to make sandwiches (bologna with mustard) for Zacchaeus for years. Elaine O'Regan, then Randy French, took over the duty of delivering the sandwiches.

In 1981, Kathleen Guinan called me to declare that we needed to establish a day sanctuary for homeless women in Washington, DC. So, Kathleen, Sr. Maria Riley, some

others I cannot remember, and I co-founded Rachel's Women's Center. We located an affordable, long-vacant house in a neighborhood that had no objection to the presence of a shelter. As we cleaned the house, it was my first experience of removing drug needles and other evidence of desperate lives. The house was so filthy that we had to wear head scarves as we cleaned cockroaches' nests and removed fecal matter. We cleansed and sanitized the house so that within months, we opened Rachel's Women's Center, a day shelter for homeless women where they were served breakfast and lunch, could shower, rest, and be safe from the streets.

Once we opened the doors to women, it was difficult to continually raise enough money to pay the rent. PAX came through for us. I announced our need at PAX one Sunday and left with enough funds for three-months' rent. We eventually were awarded an annual \$10,000.00 grant from Catholic Charities which took care of the rent. We established a board with members from various parishes in Washington, DC.

As women came to Rachel's, I was eager to discuss the programs we needed to have in place for the women such as job counseling, medical services, etc. It was a teachable moment for me when Kathleen replied that we needed not to provide the agenda to the women but to wait for the women to present their agenda to us. Kathleen was so right for indeed the women let their needs be known: educational/training programs, support groups, mental health references, free legal service and so much more.

Once a month at PAX, I announced that I was collecting funds to buy food for Rachel's. Of course, PAX was always generous. When I was in graduate school and working on my thesis, other members of PAX took over this collection. Years later, maybe in 1992, I was pleased when a relatively new PAX member approached me after mass asking if I wanted to contribute to Rachel's Women's Center. She described the center to me and hoped I would contribute. I thanked her and told her I just written a check. Secretly, I thought how wonderful-- something I helped give birth is now existing in the hands of others.

My experience at Rachel's made it very clear how easy it is to become homeless without family or a community support. The stress and hardship of homelessness leads many to mental disorders. I listened as some women spoke of believing they had become invisible since people they encountered on the streets did not look at them.

In 1979, in response to the US Bishop pastoral letter on The Right to a Decent Home, Fr. Gerry Creedon and a group of us Catholic laity throughout Northern Virginia created Catholics for Housing. We wanted to provide housing opportunities for limited-income individuals and families in Northern Virginia. It was a difficult beginning since we found most people supported the concept but did not want subsidized housing in their neighborhood. I served as the first Vice-President. Many, many years later, I believe Chris Johnston was the director.

I was the social action chairperson for St Luke's Catholic Church for 3 years. I ran the annual clothing drive which would not have been possible had not PAX individuals come in droves every Thanksgiving Saturday to help sort and pack the clothes for shipment to South America.

While on the parish board, I was able to have St Luke's join the Nestle boycott, and to publicly have the parish listed as one of the churches boycotting Nestle's unjust marketing of infant formula in developing countries.

Joan Urbanczyk, Marie Dennis, and Margaret Schellenberg founded the Center for New Creation, a center focused on the work of social justice. I joined them and served with them for several years. We published a newsletter on world economic justice, the killing fields in Cambodia, and other social justice issues. We gave retreats and presentations.

My children and I prepared food and served breakfast and lunch at the SOME Soup Kitchen several times a year. It was there that my young daughter, Kristen, learned she had to deny a person a second serving until everyone had been fed. It was so difficult to tell a person that to obtain a second serving they had to go back outside and stand at the end of the line. A good lesson, however, to be certain everyone was fed before seconds were given out.

I am a volunteer lobbyist for the McLean Branch of the American Association of University Women. Every Thursday for 6 years (had to stop due to the pandemic) Mary Lou Melley (who has been a volunteer lobbyist for over 20 years), another AAUW member, and I take the metro to Capitol Hill to lobby for laws that help women, children, and families. We meet the National AAUW Public Policy staff in the Longworth building to be briefed on the bill we are advocating for. After the briefing, we are assigned various Senators or Representatives to visit to lobby for support of the bill. I have learned a great deal in these six years about government, bipartisanship, immigration, equal pay, Title IX, paid leave, the difficulty of getting a bill passed and so much more. After January 6, we are uncertain whether we will be able to return to the Capitol to lobby.

I currently serve as President on the Pax Christi Fund for Peace board. This is where I leave our meetings inspired by Marie Dennis and Joe Nangle.

I have marched or demonstrated for the:

- end of the Viet Nam war-
- passage of the SALT II treaty
- passage of the Equal Rights Amendment
- Martin Luther King Day to be a holiday
- Equal participation of Women in the Church when Pope John Paul II came to DC
- Black Lives Matter

I have participated in Christmas in April, aptly led by Charlie Hookey, and been a religious educator of teens for PAX.

In all my service activities, I feel I walked away with more richness than I was ever able to give.