

THE Quarterly

In this special edition of our Newsletter, we honor, reflect upon and give thanks to Mary Gay Abbott-Young, who has decided to retire after nearly a half-century of being a beacon of hope for those in need.

MARY GAY ABBOTT-YOUNG

Reflecting on Nearly a Half-Century of Making a Real Difference

With conviction and passion, after nearly a half-century of helping those in our community who are marginalized and unseen, speaking up for those whose voices are often not heard, feeding those

who are hungry, housing those who are homeless, and providing opportunities for those who are seeking recovery – Mary Gay Abbott-Young has decided that it is time for her to retire from the Rescue Mission of Trenton.

By surrounding herself with like-minded colleagues, she has strategically led The Mission through some of its most challenging times, more than once when the doors were close to closing.

She is leaving in her legacy an organization that is thriving, continually evolving, and poised to create an even larger impact.



Photos by Michael Mancuso

For most of her life, on her way home from a 12-hour day at work, it was not unusual for her to roll down her window at a stop light and call out someone's first name who was panhandling, asking him or her to come by for a meal and a place to sleep at The Shelter.

Her motto became: *"Look into the eyes of someone who is struggling. See their pain. And I also ask that you see their potential."*

When she came to The Mission in the late 70's, she had just earned a Master's Degree from Temple University, served

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Reflecting on Nearly a Half-Century of Making a Real Difference

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as a social worker in VISTA, then been a counselor in a detoxification center. She was hired at The Mission to work in what is now known as the Behavioral Health Center, an addictions treatment facility, which was created as a bookend to The Shelter. She rose to become CEO of The Mission, a position she held from 1985 until 2021, when she became President.

Smiling, she remembered, "When I first came here, one guy asked me how old I was. I told him. And he spat on the floor and said, 'I've done more time

"I've come to know that by being here for one individual at a time, we can have a yet to be told effect on that individual's family for generations to come."



After coming to The Mission in the late 70's, Mary Gay rose to the helm of the organization in 1985.



"I had a chance to see, day-in and day-out, that the human spirit is so strong – and so amazing."

(in prison) than that."

While she was academically prepared to understand addiction, Mary Gay said, "I soon learned that was just one aspect of why people came here for help. Understanding poverty is another set of problems. And understanding what it is like to grow up in systematic racial discrimination is a third problem. So, I had to learn an enormous amount about how those three factors added together to impose

upon a human being's soul.

"It became clear to me that it is all connected. The Mission's work is about helping those who are marginalized by these systems. I came to understand that The Mission is a reflection of what is going on in our community – and in our society as a whole. People do not fall out of the sky and end up here on our front steps. There have been situations in their lives, and in the life of their community, that have created, unfortunately, the likelihood of them coming to The Mission.

"So, I've come to appreciate that when someone can go through all of that – and to, somehow, become a positive individual...that, to me, is an incredible sign of inner strength. I also come to know that by being here for one individual at a time, we can have a yet to be told effect on that individual's family for generations to come.

"In my career," she reflected, "I've worked with power brokers and with people who come To The Mission with all of their earthly possessions in a ripped up bag. In each of those situations, my work has been about sensing injustice, and hoping I could somehow make a difference.

"At the end of the day, it is about remembering what we have all done together, by being here when the time

was right... Of course, you never know when that time will be right.

"Some of my favorite success stories are about people who came seeking help – then, when they got back on their feet, they applied to work here, seeing it as their cause to help others. The friendships I've developed with some of those individuals are very deep.

"At the top of the list of people I

"I believe The Mission helped to fulfill my own expectations that things can always get better."

remember was Fernie Gaines. His wife Thomasine now works here. Fernie had gone through The Mission's recovery program several times before he got it. Then he came to work at The Mission, becoming the Director of Support Services. He helped me in so many ways, including his intuitive understanding of what to accept and what not to accept. He knew when to trust – and how to trust. He set a firm tone that if you didn't respect everyone you met here, you could not work here. Years later, Thomasine called me when he was dying. When I got to the hospital, there was a lot of family there, and she asked everyone if we could have some time alone together. That's how we were.

"Jim Brimmer, my predecessor, set the table. I learned so much from him. He came here as a World War II veteran. He went to Rider University, which was at the end of Carroll Street at the time. And a lot of the guys who came back from the war were staying at The Mission. Jim was drawn to the cause and became the Executive Director.

"Back then, The Mission ran five Thrift Stores, which was our biggest source of income for funding our operations. At the time, it was beyond challenging for The Mission to become financially stable."

Laughing, she added, "When I came here, we used to have sandwiches that



In 2019, The Mission opened its first Permanent Supportive House for five previously homeless women.

had a piece of cheese on them. And other sandwiches with a piece of baloney. Sometimes we were slicing the cheese and baloney very thin. So, people would try to put the cheese and baloney together to have a half-decent sandwich. They were tough times."

Changing her tone, she said, "From time to time, Jim asked a few of us if we

"The relationships we develop inform what we need to do next. It all starts with caring. When we hear of a need, we know in our hearts what we need to do."

could wait until after the weekend to cash our checks. Then, one day, he told everyone to look for new jobs, because we would be closing. He did not want to take government funding, which I saw as our only way out. We debated fiercely about it until, with no other choice but to close our doors, he agreed with me. I am forever grateful that he brought The Mission to the doorstep of change."

Fast forward, and in the early 1980's a seismic shift occurred as crack cocaine

ravaged Trenton, like most every city in this country, destroying the fabric of families and leaving devastation in its wake.

In the midst of that shift, Mary Gay became the Chief Executive Officer of The Mission, a position she held until 2021, when she became President. At the helm of this venerable organization, she oversaw a transformation that continues to address the changing needs of those who are most vulnerable and too-often forgotten in this capital city, where nearly one out of every three individuals is living below the poverty line.

With her firm hand and apt guidance:

- The Shelter, where The Mission's work began, evolved from a refuge for anyone experiencing homelessness who needs a warm meal and a safe place to sleep to a center where individuals are offered a full range of professional case management services, including healthcare, behavioral health counseling, addiction treatment, financial assistance – and last year 106 previously homeless individuals obtained housing.
- Meanwhile, the Behavioral Health



In 2015, celebrating the organization's 100th anniversary, The Mission, with the help of the entire community, broke the Guinness World Record by collecting 179,550 items of clothing to help those in need.

Center, a state licensed addictions treatment facility, has advanced to provide a comprehensive approach where professional counselors help individuals overcome the challenges they have been facing, while also being able to take advantage of educational and vocational opportunities.

- As part of an all-embracing commitment to end homelessness, The Mission also ventured into Supportive Housing, now owning six houses and one apartment building, which provides a home for 48 individuals.
- In addition to the Thrift Store, which continues to be a vital part of our community, providing gently-used clothes for those in need, The Mission also opened a Food Pantry, a need that rose from our community since the onslaught of the pandemic.
- And most recently, The Mission, in partnership with other like-minded agencies, initiated a Mobile Outreach

“Some of my favorite success stories are about people who came seeking help – then they applied to work here, seeing it as their cause to help others.”

Initiative with Certified Peer Recovery Specialists driving to places where people living on the streets and struggling

with addiction are known to congregate – offering a cup of coffee, something to eat, a caring conversation – and, when an individual is ready, medication to help with recovery, access to healthcare and shelter from their personal storms.

As Mary Gay shared, “The need for The Mission to continually adapt rises unmistakably from our community. The relationships we develop inform what we need to do next. It all starts with caring. Then, when we see a need, we know in our hearts what we need to do.”

What kept her motivated, for nearly a half century, to keep striving against daunting odds?

“So many things. First and foremost, the relationships I developed became very important to me – here within The Mission and with our community partners.

“Also, while there were enormous challenges and much sadness, there were also many successes along the way that were truly inspiring.

“I also thrive on seeing the potential in someone who does not see that potential in themselves. And helping them realize who they can be.

“Ultimately, I had a chance to see, day-in and day-out, that the human spirit is so strong – and so amazing.

“And, I believe, The Mission helped to fulfill my own expectations that things can always get better.”

Leaving a Legacy of Caring Deeply

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Barrett said, “Right. In the beginning, middle and end, it is all about caring. And helping someone believe that they can change.”

Mary Gay concluded, “I believe that The Mission – with its current leadership team, Board of Directors, talented staff, dedicated volunteers and devout donors – is in an ideal place to stay true to our calling, while making the

changes necessary to continually help those in need.”

“Hopefully, we can help you to find your way home – whether it is a home you are returning to or a new home for you.”

Two Kindred Spirits, Working Together to Help Those in Need

“When I first met Mary Gay,” Connie Mercer, the founder of HomeFront, said, “I knew that, together, we could make things happen.”

“From the beginning,” Mary Gay nodded in agreement, “we had a deep connection. I knew that, together, we could get things done that would have been inconceivable otherwise.” As they collaborated, she added, “we were able to build upon each other’s energy, and push against the status quo – with what some people might politely call tenacity.”

At the time, in the late 1980’s, Mary Gay was at the helm of The Mission, which had been helping individuals experiencing homelessness for nearly a century; while Connie’s organization, from which she recently retired as the Chief Executive Officer, had just started “at my kitchen table.”

With a group of volunteers, Connie was providing meals to hundreds of homeless families who were “warehoused in squalid motels from hell,” as she described them, along Route 1. “There was no place to cook, no place to refrigerate a baby’s bottle, and the only place where children could play was on the asphalt, next to rooms that had prostitutes and drug dealers,” she explained, with a fury that still ignites her. Connie added, “The motel owners were paid a lot of government money, but the people received absolutely no services, only staying because they had nowhere else to go.

“At first we recognized the need. And we brought food and water. But we knew that was not enough. So, we grew from seeing more and more needs, and trying to fulfill them. When they didn’t

have shoes, we got them shoes. Then, we’d get coats because it was getting cold. Then, we’d help them move all their earthly possessions in those damn green garbage bags from a motel to their own apartment. Then, we couldn’t leave these folks that we’d come to care about without any furniture. That’s how we grew. From following the needs.”

Meanwhile, Connie added, “In order

“In Mary Gay, I saw – and drew upon – her strength, integrity, persistence and support.”

to make things happen, together, Mary Gay and I had to scare people out of their complacency.” Reaching out to the editors of local newspapers as well as City, County and State representatives, they raised awareness to the plight of people facing homelessness.

Connie noted, “In Mary Gay, I saw – and drew upon – her strength, integrity, persistence and support.” Mary Gay added, “In Connie, I saw an amazing ability to network. If you want a meeting in the State of New Jersey, there are two people to call – and Connie is one of them.”

Mary Gay added, “The support we’ve always had for each other is



Connie Mercer, the founder of HomeFront, and Mary Gay have had a deep connection from the time they met.

unwavering. We understood, like no one else could, what we were in it for – and what we were up against. When times got tough, we called each other – and heard, ‘I get it. I understand.’ Then, after listening, say, ‘Just remember, this is what we signed up for. This is why you keep pushing that huge boulder up that steep hill. It’s because the people we are here for need us.”

Together, while now retired, their work continues, undaunted.

Connie, who is the Executive Director of the New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness, shared, “Our goal is to help make sure we have a sustainable funding system for shelters, lobbying the State House, teaching people how to fundraise, developing training for frontline staff, and helping to make sure that the needs of people experiencing homelessness are met.”

Mary Gay, who is on the Board of Directors of the Coalition, added, “If I can share some of what I’ve learned to help build better systems for helping people experiencing homelessness – I will be very grateful.”

I Was There, You're Going To Get Through This

After Thomasine Gaines retired, Mary Gay said to her, "I have a job for you." Then she told Thomasine she wanted her to be the person that women first meet when they are addicted, pregnant and seeking help. "Being part of the For My Baby and Me program has been one of the best things in my life," Thomasine said.

"I see a lot of tragic things," she added. "Some things can make you cry. And it does something inside of you. The first person I helped, I met her in the hospital about 3 o'clock in the morning. She didn't have any family around. So she asked me to cut the umbilical cord. Lord knows, she tried. She couldn't stay clean, though. I don't know where she is today. But I'm sure the angels are watching over her son Michael.

"Still, there are some women who

do get their lives back together. And that is what keeps me going," Thomasine said.

"Each of the women know that I have been where they are. I talk on their level. I approach them with an open mind and heart. And with such hope. I know that now may not be the right time. Then, again, it might be. I think of when I was out there. And all the times I tried. And I kept falling by the wayside. It took me twenty years to get it up here," she said, pointing to her head.

Mary Gay said, "I knew Thomasine would be perfect at what she does. She prepares the women for what is next. She talks them through the emotions they are going to feel. Then she says, 'I was there. You are going to get through this. And I will be there for you.'"

Thomasine concluded, "Mary Gay

has a whole lot to do with the way I am living my life today. I'm so grateful. And I say that all the time."



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Mary Gay wanted Thomasine to be the person that women first met when they were addicted, pregnant and seeking help.

I Miss That Yellow Raincoat

Denise Chapman, a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, who recently was promoted to Manager, started in The Shelter nearly two decades ago. "I never was involved in any hard core drugs myself," she said, "but a lot of people in my family have been there. So, I can see it in someone. I can see it in their eyes. In how they carry themselves. I've seen the devastation it can have on a family. That is why what I am doing means so much to me."

"From the first time I met Denise, I saw she was authentic," Mary Gay shared. "She knew many of the people coming to The Shelter from the streets. She is the same cheerful, but no-nonsense, person you see everywhere. To everyone she meets, she is the same – certain, sure, confident, with a knowing smile. And anyone who can keep that smile while they are working here is someone I definitely wanted to have



Anyone who can keep that smile while they are working here is someone I definitely wanted to have around."



"I've seen the devastation drugs can have on a family," Denise said.

around."

"Often, when someone comes in," Denise said, "I can tell they need a

shower. So I let them take a shower right away, so they can feel better about themselves. Then I take them to get some new clothes, socks and shoes. Then, as I get them something to eat, I'll let them know that I don't accept cursing here. 'So, if you need to get something out of your system,' I'll say, 'step outside and curse all you want. Then come back in here, and be positive. Because we need positive energy here! I'll say, 'We are here to help someone feel better about themselves. It starts with respecting each other, so we can all get better.'"

She added, "Mary Gay set the stage for who we are and how we treat each other. I've seen her give her own clothes, including a yellow raincoat, to someone who came here when it was raining."

Laughing, Mary Gay, said, "I miss that yellow raincoat."

We Understand, But Don't Focus on Your Yesterdays

When Cleo Patterson walked inside the cell where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for 27 years on Robben Island, she said, "Tears covered my face, as I fell to the floor, and the direction of my life changed." Walking through the dire poverty of Cape Town afterwards, as if in a daze, she added, "I knew I had to do something more meaningful in my life."

That led her to The Mission, where Mary Gay said, "I kept hearing from people how she helped them. And I would go out of my way just to stop by Cleo's office to say, 'Hello.' And I always learned something. And we always laughed about something."

Then, Mary Gay said to Cleo, "You are known for your kindness."

Cleo, a counselor in The Mission's Behavioral Health Center, responded, "People need to hear that someone cares for them. I have a tendency to

meet someone where they are at. I help them feel safe. And I let them know they will be OK. And that I believe they have potential that they don't even know they have."

She added, "Here, we welcome you. We care about the here and now – and where you are going. We understand, but don't focus on your yesterdays. Learning how to be in the present is more important. That will lead to your tomorrows. What happened yesterday is just a chapter. It goes in your book. But your story doesn't end there. This can be your beginning."

Then, Cleo said, "I tell everyone, 'You are the reason I came to work today.'"

Looking at Mary Gay, she added, "I always sought you out because I wanted to gain from your wisdom. We've had moments together where



"What happened yesterday is just a chapter. It goes in your book. But your story doesn't end there. This can be your beginning."



Cleo said, "I tell everyone, 'You are the reason I came to work today.'"

I've learned things that I know will help me later in life."

Pausing, she added, "I will miss you so."

That Special Little Drop of Something That Lets People Know You Care

"I come here seeking help," said Kenneth Smith, who is now a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist in The Mission's Behavioral Health Center. "Then, after I completed Recovery Court, and spoke at the graduation, Barrett asked if I'd be interested in applying to work here, which I was thrilled to do."

His laugh resounding, Kenneth added, "My first interaction with Mary Gay was when she sent me home, with pay. I was a newbie. A fire alarm went off, and I left the list of who was in the building on the dining room table."

Mary Gay explained, "If that was a real fire, that confidential list would have been very important. So, it was a lesson for us to retrain our staff. Everybody can make an error. We saw this as an opportunity to get it right. And Kenneth took it to heart, with reverence – which was



You are a living testimony to the fact that holding ourselves accountable is such an important part of the recovery process."



Kenneth's story brings hope to people on the streets, thinking that maybe one day they, too, can change.

as important for everyone to see as the lesson itself."

She added, "You are a living testimony to the fact that holding ourselves accountable is such an important part of the recovery process." Fervently, Kenneth agreed, "I stay consistent with myself, so I can be consistent with others. I have over 12 years clean, which is a blessing. That's why people in recovery are interested in my story. They know I went through this program. It brings hope to people I know who are still on the streets, thinking that maybe one day they, too, can change."

Mary Gay added, "You bring that special little drop of something that lets people know that you care about them. Whatever that special drop is, please keep bringing it."

"You will be really missed, Mary Gay. I love you," Kenneth concluded.

The World of a Child Growing Up Around People Who Were Homeless

Jimmy Brimmer, the namesake and son of Mary Gay's predecessor at the helm of The Mission, shared that he was born 75 years ago "on The Mission's farm in Crosswicks, where there was a caretaker named Roy. They grew corn and other vegetables. There were cows, pigs and chickens.

"After that," Jimmy said, "I grew up at The Mission, which was just the building at 98 Carroll Street and the truck yard. My father, who was the Executive Director, had an apartment on the second floor. We lived there until I was in second grade. That was my life."

As a child, growing up around people who were homeless, he added, "I was an adult before I was a teenager. My first friends in life were the men at The Mission. But I never thought of them as homeless. Across from my apartment was Gene, who was the General Manager of

The Mission's stores," where second-hand clothes and furniture were donated, then sold to help pay for operating The Mission. "Gene had been a buyer for Macy's, and would tell me fascinating stories. He and the others all treated me as a friend. For some of them, this was their home. Others came and went. Many were professional people. Others were talented craftspeople. They worked hard, and knew how to have a fun time.

"So I grew up without any prejudice. It didn't matter to me where someone came from. Or what they were doing. None of those differences mattered to me. And it certainly never affected any of my relationships with any of the people staying there."

Jimmy described his father, known as Jim, as "larger than life. He was fair, honest, had enormous integrity, and cared deeply about what he was doing. His life



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Jimmy Brimmer, the namesake and son of Mary Gay's predecessor was born on The Mission's farm in Crosswicks.

was a calling, and he lived it." He added, "I'm sure my dad would have solace knowing that Mary Gay stayed for as long as she did, and took The Mission to the next level!"

That Last Time Was The Time I Needed

"I came back and forth here so many times," Clayton Dixon recalled, shaking his head. "I was just deceiving myself. But you never turned her back on me. And that last time, that was the time I needed. That time, my spirit was gone. The hope was gone. And this place gave me back my spirit and my hope."

"That time," Mary Gay remembered, "I could see you believed 'Today is my day.' There was a spark inside of you that wanted to find its way out." Then she reflected, "I often wonder: What happens to someone that allows them to come to that point?"

Clayton said, "For me, it was that you never turned your back on me. That you somehow believed. Because I had turned my back on myself. It took me 15 years of coming here, leaving and coming back to finally be ready."



I could see you believed that 'Today is my day.' There was a spark inside of you that wanted to find its way out."



Clayton said, "You never turned your back on me...even though I turned my back on myself."

Mary Gay said, "There are some people, like you, who come here and you just

feel a connection, you feel a bond, and you see something inside of them. But until they realize it, and start changing, you're never quite sure. They might relapse. Still, you let them know that you still believe in them, that you care. It starts with that relationship. Then, as you see them start to recover, it is the joy of seeing them find themselves again. That's why we are here. To be the constant."

Smiling, Clayton responded, "I always say that God has a sense of humor. How else can I explain that I came here seeking help, and now I'm on the Board helping make decisions about the future of The Mission? I'm still spellbound. I realize that some people might identify with me, and that might help them believe that they, too, can recover. And if that's what I'm here for, then I am blessed. And I am grateful."

That's When I Knew That Change Could Happen

When Marygrace Billek came to Trenton to oversee a grant designed to help pregnant women who were addicted, she said, "Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes told me that to learn about homelessness in this community, you need to sit at the feet of two people: Mary Gay and Connie Mercer. When I met them, I knew that change could happen. I quickly learned that they were the OG's (*Original Gangsters*) of homeless work. And I never looked back."

Marygrace, who recently retired as Director of Human Services for the County of Mercer, added, "We were all in it together. We understood the devastation that poverty brings, and how it changes everything – including access to education, jobs, housing, and virtually every opportunity to succeed. And we were intent on creating real change in the systems that have an impact on the lives of so many people in our community."



We were intent on creating real change in the systems that have an impact on the lives of so many people in our community."



Marygrace said, "You have to surround yourself with like-minded people who know how to make the things happen."

Mary Gay added, "Together, we had many struggles and several successes. It was all about the strengths of our relationships. It was about good people who

believed passionately about trying to do the right thing. We had a shared vision. And a drive to create real change – with the ultimate goal of ending homelessness. And we saw that as just a starting point. Once we helped someone get housing, we also wanted to be there to make sure they had access to the resources they needed to succeed."

The real depth of relationships are often realized during the most challenging times. "When the pandemic hit," Marygrace recalled, "we had eight o'clock calls every morning with top government officials, and heads of healthcare systems and nonprofits to make sure that people in our community who were homeless were kept safe." As they navigated this uncharted territory together, Marygrace said, "You have to surround yourself with like-minded people who know how to make the things happen. Then be there to lift each other up."

I Never Knew My Dad—Neither Did My Mother

Zane Gaines never knew his father. And neither did his mother. "My mom was addicted. Living on the streets. And she was raped. That's how I came to be.

"Then Ann Gaines, a church going lady, who was in her late 50's, on dialysis, living in our neighborhood in East Trenton, offered to take me from my mom when I was born," he said. "Miss Ann was wonderful. But I strayed before I came to follow what she tried to teach me."

When he was in his 20's and 30's, Zane came to The Mission several times. "I had a fire in me to get clean," he said. "But I kept putting that fire out.

"I would start off in Room Number 1, which was a place where Miss Shelia Scott, may she rest in peace, felt you should spend time by yourself to reflect on whether you really wanted to be in this place," he recalled. "The fourth time,

I knew I was ready. I knew I could face myself and my demons. That I had the strength to persevere. That I could get everything I needed from the program.

"That time, I asked Mary Gay, 'What do you need me to work at?' And she responded, 'You're going to be just fine here.' Now I've been clean 13 years.

"When I was ready to leave the program and wanted to get my Commercial Driver License, Mary Gay helped me get the money I needed. That's how she is. And that belief that she had in me gave me the confidence I needed to carry on.

"Then I got a job at Shop Rite. And now I am an Assistant Manager at the Shop Rite in the Mercer Mall. And I am engaged to be married. All of this started with Mary Gay's belief in me."

"Your life is now in a beautiful place," Mary Gay said, smiling.



That belief that she had in me gave me the confidence I needed to carry on."



It took until the fourth time of coming to The Mission for Zane to know he was "ready to face myself and my demons."

"Thank you," Zane said, nodding. "I love you very much."

Seeing Things In People That Will Happen Later

"I met Mary Gay in the early 90's, when I first went through The Mission's recovery program," Dusty Ross shared. After several relapses, though, deciding he needed a change, he left for North Carolina, where he worked at FedEx until he had a heart attack, so came back home to Trenton.

Soon after, Dusty said, "I was walking downtown, and Mary Gay rolled down her car's window and called out to me. I told her I needed a job. She said, 'OK.' Then a few days later, Barrett called and asked me to stop by. And they hired me to be a Peer Recovery Specialist. That was 2016. But I was not good with the computer. I was always scared to learn. So, I took my time, wrote down everything, practiced, and now I've mastered it. Before that, my mentality was that I would just work in a warehouse all my life. Now I know I can be more. I can help others who are struggling.

"I've celebrated nine years clean," he added. "And it is because of her. She could see good in me. I always say Mary Gay is a prophet. She can see things in people that will happen later, if they want to change.

"She didn't give up on me," Dusty said. "And I thank her for that. I can see the light now. She kept me on my toes. She asked for my opinions about what was going on. She trusted me, while she held me responsible. She made me better. She is a blessing. And has always been there for me."

Smiling Mary Gay responded, "Dusty has a beautiful way of connecting with people who are on a similar course. And they trust each other. That, to me, is one of the hallmarks of how people recover.

"He is also a talented singer, who put together a music group that has a CD," she added. "They even performed

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Dusty said, "Now I know I can be more. I can help others who are struggling."

at some churches to raise money for The Mission."

Saving More Than 40 Lives By Administering Narcan

Two decades ago, Tyrone Riley said, "I was living on the streets, so I would come to The Shelter from time to time for a meal and a place to rest my head. Then Sheila Scott, bless her soul, told me I could go into The Mission's recovery program, which I did for about seven months. But I wasn't ready. So, I ended up back on the streets.

"I knew something was off center. And I knew it was me. I had to reconnect with me. So, I reached out to Shelia and asked if I could come back. And she said, 'Yes.' And it was like such a sigh of relief. She gave me another chance.

"After nine months of intense self-reflection, I felt like a baby bird – not quite ready to fly. Then Mary Gay asked if I wanted a job heading up housekeeping. So I knew she saw something in me, trusting me to head up a team. And I took advantage of that opportunity."

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I am grateful to have been there at the right time to save their lives.”



Tyrone said, "I thank God for the life I lived – because I can recognize when someone is starting to show signs that they have overdosed and needs help."

Fast forward, and Tyrone is now The Shelter's Manager. During his tenure at

The Mission, he has helped revive more than 40 people who were overdosing by administering Narcan (a potentially lifesaving nasal spray medication that can revive someone who has overdosed on opioids).

"I am grateful to have been there at the right time to save their lives," he said, with a tone that was equally modest and reflective. "I thank God," he added, "for the life I lived – because I can recognize when someone is starting to show signs that they have overdosed and needs help. I've also come across some people who have already turned blue, and been able to save them with Narcan. That can be scary. But I know I am there to help that person come out of it and breathe on their own. And to possibly have another chance to change their lives."

"Thank you," Mary Gay said. "How lucky we are to have you here."

You Are A Master Planner, Who Can See The Future

Just shy of three decades ago, Mary Gay was encouraging Delia Bass Dandridge to chair The Mission's Board of Directors. "I told Mary Gay I was not quite ready for that," Delia said, "so I agreed to be a Member of the Board."

"We only had to wait about 15 years for you to chair the Board," Mary Gay said, laughing.

"Yes. You always have a plan. That's how I saw you," Delia agreed. "That is a theme I've seen play out throughout the time I have known you. You get an idea of how someone can become part of The Mission, you share it, and somehow that idea comes to fruition."

"During your time of chairing the Board," Mary Gay said, "we had some wonderful celebrations, including entering the Guinness Book of World Records for collecting the largest number of clothes to be given to those in need; and investing in housing, including an apartment complex with supportive services for 15 previously homeless



Delia said about Mary Gay, "You get an idea of how someone can become part of The Mission, you share it, and somehow that idea comes to fruition."

individuals."

"We also faced some daunting challenges," Delia added, "including determining how The Mission could remain

fiscally viable as we navigated an entirely new landscape in behavioral healthcare. So, together, we created a strategic plan that included forecasting where we felt future funding might come from."

"Fortunately, because of the wisdom of our Board," Mary Gay said, "we were able to thrive. We visited experts who shared likely scenarios. We had so many people on our Board who knew who to call, no matter what the issue was. And that helped us stay ahead of the curve."

"Most importantly," Delia said, "we trusted your judgment. When you would bring an idea to us, it was always well considered. And you were seeking to have a robust conversation about what we needed to do next. You are a master planner, who can see the future. You would see something in people. Then, together, we would decide strategically how to move forward."

Having A Broad Perspective About Our Mission

Doug Borden, a founder of Borden Perlmans and former Chair of The Mission's Board, met Mary Gay in 1983. "I saw in you someone who could make a difference in an area that I believed in," he shared.

"You took me under your wing, which I greatly appreciated," Mary Gay said. "When I first got here, there were 13 employees. And it took a lot of courage for the Board, at that time, to believe that I could run this predominantly male-dominated organization with a lot of tough characters." Smiling, she added, "Initially, they were concerned that I would not be assertive enough."

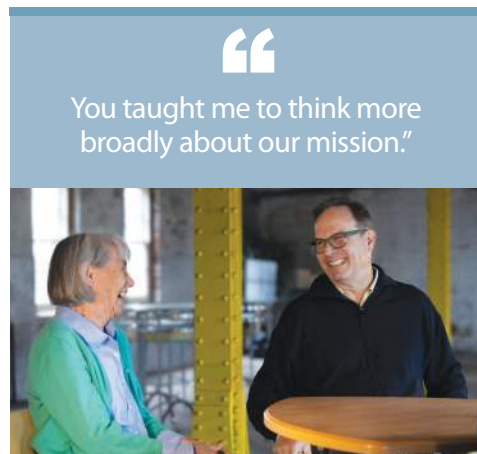
Laughing, Doug said, "They soon discovered they had nothing to be worried about."

He added, "A major area of unease

for the Board at that time was The Thrift Store – because it was so expensive to run. Still, I was always in favor of keeping the store because it was a place where a mother could come in with just a few dollars and leave with a bag full of clothes for her kids. So, I always argued to keep The Thrift Store open even though we could never make it sustainable on its own."

"Mary Gay underscored, "Often business executives will look at a budget and see items that are in the red and say, 'Let's eliminate these areas.' But your perspective on why we were here was so much bigger than that. You taught me how to think more broadly about our mission."

"You taught me a lot, too," Doug emphasized, "Your focus on having diversity of ideas was so important. Even including having a former resident on the Board to



Doug saw in Mary Gay "someone who could make a difference."

represent those we served. That is something I carry with me today whenever I am facing a major decision – either personally or professionally."



Feeding those who are hungry, housing those who are homeless, and providing opportunities for all.

Leaving a Legacy of Caring Deeply

Three years ago, as Mary Gay prepared to retire, the Mission's Board of Directors asked if she would consider staying on as President for a few years, helping to create a smooth leadership transition, as Barrett Young took the helm of the organization as the Chief Executive Officer.

"This was a perfect win-win, connecting The Mission's noble past with the challenges of today and our vision for the future," reflected Niel Siekerka, the Board's Chair.

He added, "The true mettle of Barrett's leadership was challenged like never before as he led our organization through the pandemic. And his ability to inspire The Mission's staff has helped to create innovative solutions, improve the lives of our clients, create cost-effective measures, and expand the organization's capabilities."

Barrett's said his vision for The Mission's future "starts with something that has always been at the heart of our organization: seeing the potential in someone who is struggling – often a



Connecting The Mission's noble past with the challenges of today and our vision for the future.

potential that they cannot see." He added, "Our 'constant' is our belief in those

"We welcome you. But we don't want you to stay. We want to help you find your way out of here."

who come to us for help. We strive to be that stability in someone's life who has nowhere else to turn – provid-

ing hope and love. That is why we are here."

Mary Gay responded, "Imagine being homeless, losing all hope, and having someone on our team let you know that they know who you are. That they care about you. And believe in you. When you are down and out, and someone here remembers you... that, alone, can help you believe there is hope."

Barrett added, "If this is the first time you have ever come here, we start by asking: *What's your name?* Because we care about who you are. Then we ask: *Are you hungry?* From there, we get to know more about you to see how we can help. Our message is: We welcome you. But we don't want you to stay. We are consciously a place of transition. We want to help you find your way out of here. Hopefully, we can help you to find your way home – whether it is a home you are returning to or a new home for you. And to know that whatever happens, we will always be here for you."

Sharing their intentions, it was like they were completing each other's sentences.

Mary Gay added, "That is the constant."