

Third Way Media



Shaping Families

Pilot Script: Living to Serve

Pam

June 1, 2009

(Sound effects of wind or storm)

Pam: The people that we come in contact with ... have sometimes been beaten down by more than just a storm or disaster and at first you don't know that.

Burton: When a hurricane, tornado or fire strikes, it receives mega media attention for the next couple days, and maybe follow-up stories for several weeks or months. But then the media—and we—are on to the next disaster. The people left in the wake of a storm or other crisis not only deal with lack of housing which can take years to replace, but lives altered forever. I'm Burton Buller and this is *Shaping Families*, a time to reflect on what the Good News of Jesus means to us every day—especially in times of special need or crisis.

Melodie: And I'm Melodie Davis, producer for *Shaping Families*. This program comes to you from the studios of Third Way Media in Harrisonburg, Va. and is presented by the Mennonite churches. Today we focus on how to show God's love and compassion to friends and neighbors dealing with tough times. Sometimes these neighbors may live many miles away.

Burton: Sometimes when we try to help someone, we end up feeling they helped us more. Today on *Shaping Families* you'll meet Pam, a woman we interviewed for a special DVD encouraging youth in the way of Christian service and peace. After a hurricane, Pam volunteered for an extended stint in Jackson, Tennessee, and then went through a life crisis of her own. We start with Pam talking about what happens when volunteers take up a hammer to help rebuild a home after a storm:

Pam: Sometimes I think one of the most important things we build is dignity.

Burton: Volunteers do more than just repair roofs.

Pam: The people that we come in contact with ... have sometimes been beaten down by more than just a storm or disaster and at first you don't know that. But as you work with them you realize that life isn't always kind and there were problems in their lives before a disaster hit and the disaster just adds on and exacerbates previous problems.

Burton: Pam said that listening and observing brings personal insights.

Pam: We tell our volunteers that come in that sometimes the most important part of your job is to put your hammer down, when a homeowner comes and ... wants to talk. ... And from the start of a project 'til the finish of a project you watch these homeowners and you listen to the story and if you've heard the story more than once or twice, maybe six or seven times, all of a sudden the story starts to change and the words are different and the body language is different and you hear what was a

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devastating story to begin with now becomes a story of possible hope, and that within that story personal dignity was restored.

Burton: Pam told the story of Mr. Walker, who had all the windows in his house blow in on top of him as he tried to hold the door shut. He and the others in the house had ignored tornado warnings because they never thought something like that would happen in his area.

Pam: That kind of stuff happens on television. And the three of them in that house laid down on top of each other in the hallway and started praying, 'Please God, please God', you know. And he was spared. And then we asked him well, why do you think you were spared, after all you've been through in your life, Mr. Walker?

Burton: Mr. Walker had been in and out of the hospital with an ongoing illness.

Pam: And he started to talk about, 'Well, I guess God spared me because some day I'm going to do something; he wants me to do something.' And then he stopped and he said, he just got very quiet and he looked at us and he said, 'God spared me because he loves me.' And I thought that's what peacemaking is all about. God spared me because he loves me.

Burton: The Mr. Walkers of the world often feel no one loves them.

Pam: 'Cause Mr. Walker's a throwaway. You know Mr. Walker is sick and Mr. Walker doesn't have a job and Mr. Walker doesn't have a family, but now he knows that God loves him.

Burton: Pam first became interested in service when a flood hit a nearby town. After seeing the wonderful people who helped in that area, she was inspired to become a volunteer.

Pam: There was always, 'Well, you know, some day I oughta sign up and do something like that.' And of course the story falls off the front page and life goes on and that someday doesn't come and now it's in your backyard and it's hard to ignore.

Burton: But then her church got involved and she finally did, too.

Pam: But I went in with this idea of, you know that hymn, 'Will you let me be your servant? Will you let me be as Christ to you?' And I believe other words are, 'I will hold the lamplight for you in the darkness of your fear.' It was I will do. I will do. I will do. Mennonites were pretty good at doing things and we like to do things, quietly, yes, but we like to do.

Burton: Pam and her husband volunteered in various locations together. She enjoyed helping others very much. Then he died suddenly. We'll find out what happened next after this word.

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Burton: Pam volunteered in a disaster relief program with her husband, Dean, and then he died very suddenly. Today on *Shaping Families*, we're exploring Christian service and what it can mean at both ends—giver and receiver. Or maybe the question is, who is giver, who is receiver?

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Pam: I was pretty much at loose ends and I was grieving and I got a phone call that we had built a house for in Birmingham, Alabama in a very poor African-American community called Oakridge.

Burton: Somehow one of the women where they built a house got Pam's phone number.

Pam: I was sitting at home and I answered the phone and it's Jeanette. Now Jeanette is from Jamaica and Jeanette is a Christian, a very strong professing Christian that has a spiritual life that is not as familiar to me as a Mennonite. Much to my surprise to hear her voice on the phone and the first words out of her mouth were, 'What's the matter?' And I said, 'Jeanette what do you mean?' And she said, 'You and God have appeared in my dreams three nights this week and you're saying that you need me.' And I said, 'Well yes, Dean passed away last week.' And she said, 'Then you need to come back to us and you need to let us heal you this time.' And I talked a bit about that with her and I hung up the phone and I thought, but can I accept that? I'm the doer. And the end of that hymn says, 'Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant, too.' And I thought, I have to live out the rest of that hymn.

Burton: Pam flew to Birmingham for a weekend.

Pam: That ... African-American community put me up in their homes and walked the streets with me where we had built before and said, 'You're here for a reason. Let us wrap our arms around you when you need us. Like you all did us when we needed you.'

Burton: Pam went to their church service on Sunday.

Pam: And it was a healing service, and I was the only white woman there. And I went down on my knees in front of their pastor and their choir sang, 'Hold on, Sister' and they laid their hands on me in healing and we prayed together that whatever I needed now would be granted by the Lord.

Burton: Pam learned what it means to be open to relationships, not just service.

Pam: My idea of service is to look for look for the completed circle in things. I think too many times we go in with an idea of service being, I will go in and I will fix and I will make friends, yes, and then at the end of my time there I will leave, and perhaps I will hear from someone but that will be the end of it. Now I'm aware that it's not an end, it's just a beginning and that these connections, these spiritual connections are so strong that they go beyond what we could have imagined when we first signed on to do any type of service work. But I had to be open to allow that to happen, to allow a community to be able to give back, and to give back with dignity.

Burton: Pam's story of how the people whom she went to serve gave back to *her* reinforce this idea: one of the best ways we can live our Christian faith: by *giving ourselves* away in service to others.

This radio program, *Shaping Families*, is part of the outreach of Third Way Media. At Third Way, we also produce what many say is a very helpful Web site, Third Way Café. It has

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information on faith questions on Mennonites. Here's our producer to share a question sent to Third Way Café.

Melodie: Some of our favorite questions involve the bedrock foundational principles of the Christian faith from a Mennonite perspective. One question was “Why is community important to Mennonites?” The answer is related to our conversation with Pam today: It takes a community to restore life after the devastation of a storm—sometimes the larger community—people coming in from outside areas to help. But helpers need a true service mentality. This approach involves not giving from a pedestal or with a “holier than thou, better off than you” attitude. Rather, it takes a “here I am to help, I may need your help next week” kind of attitude. Listening to others and allowing them to give back to you completes the circle that Pam talked about today. Everyone has something to give, and in giving we are enabled to have true dignity and worth in the community. It is the kind of thing Jesus taught us with statements like “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Burton: Thanks, that's very true. And this approach is what gives meaning to our days and our lives. God made us that way. Today we invite you to visit our Web site where you can find links to more of Pam's story on a DVD. Our Web site is ShapingFamilies.com. You'll also find links to various service programs sponsored by Mennonites. We also welcome your prayers and financial support. *Shaping Families* is a ministry of the Mennonite churches.