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POSTHUMOUSLY



MARIA PEREZ

A DYNAMIC FORCE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE!

by Mikell Worley

Maria Perez was born in 1948 in San Turce, Puerto Rico. She spent the early part of her childhood living there with her parents and her older brother and two sisters. When Maria was in second grade she moved to New York City, New York, with her mom and younger sister for a better life. Her older siblings came later.

Life was hard for Maria after the move, because her mother didn't speak English and the family suffered financial difficulties. Nevertheless, Maria was a diligent worker and became the first in her family to attend college. She earned an account-

ing degree from Baruch College, the City University of New York, in the early 1980s.

Her daughter, Zeeva Jackson-Li, cherishes her earliest memories of her mother, “She was always involved in a political cause. She took me to all of her rallies and social justice activities. She was actively involved with Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition, an organization established in 1971 by Reverend Jesse Jackson that was dedicated to improving the economic condition of black communities across the United States.

“She organized a huge demonstration to have Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday recognized as a national holiday. It made the front page of the *New York Times*. I’ve been to lots of rallies since then, but I’ve never been to anything nearly as large.”

In 1985, when Zeeva was eight years old, Maria enrolled her in the Milton Hershey School in Hershey, Pennsylvania. As soon as she could relocate, Maria moved to the Harrisburg community to be closer to her daughter. “She had to make some adjustments in Harrisburg. She learned to drive in her forties,” Zeeva notes. “There hadn’t been a need [to drive] in New York City.”

Maria’s first job in Harrisburg was at a photography shop. Later, in the early 1990s, she took a job at Gaudenzia, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. During that time, she earned a master’s degree in education from Shippensburg University. “She worked to connect people to their own spirituality to help them stay clean. She felt that having a personal relationship with their creator would help them recover some spiritual hurt so they would not have to self-medicate. She put more of an emphasis on spirituality than organized religion. She was a revolutionary, and they allowed her to do what she wanted to do, even though some disagreed with her approach. Her many successes confirmed that her methods were effective.”

Wherever she was in life, Maria never stopped working for social change. “She would become frustrated that no one in the area was doing anything, so she got right to work. One time, she and seven other people filed a law suit against [Harrisburg] Mayor Stephen Reed for misappropriation of funds and raised a ruckus with city council.”

Her efforts didn’t go unnoticed. “She received death threats in the mail box. Once there was a Barbie doll hanging from a noose on the porch,” Zeeva remembers. “In the mid-80s there weren’t a lot of people of color in the area, and most of the members of the community were very complacent. They had no interest in creating tension or challenging the way the city was being run.

“My mom was proud of her work to have Market Street in Harrisburg changed to Martin Luther King Boulevard. Sadly, it was changed back without telling anyone, but it was successful for a time.”

Liver cancer claimed the life of dynamic social activist Maria Perez on March 2, 2010, ten days before her 62nd birthday. Her family, community, clients, and all those whose lives she touched continue to miss her. Maria is survived by her daughters Zeeva and Isaura; six grandchildren--James, Ben, Josh, Zerick, India, and Ruby; and one great-grandchild, Seth.

Zeeva says, “My mom watched me struggle to fit in. I’m half black and half Puerto Rican, and I didn’t fit into either culture when I was growing up. My Mom felt that all people were affected by racism and that we should all work together instead of perpetuating separatism. She wanted all races to work together and heal together. I think Coretta Scott King and Martin Luther King, Jr. would be proud of the work my Mom did to promote racial equality and social justice.

“I’m 34 years old and I have never known anyone like her. Bringing people of all races together was one of my Mom’s greatest skills.” ❖

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ANN MOFFITT

A LIFE OF JOYFUL GIVING

by Mikell Worley

Ann Moffitt's life-long dedication to helping others began at an early age. As a teenager she "served as a local volunteer and participated in programs on the national level at the YWCA in York where my mother worked. My mother graduated from college in 1926, a rare accomplishment for a woman at that time. She was progressive and open with strong values. Through her example, I grew up believing that there were no limitations on what a woman could achieve."

Ann put that belief into practice. In her early twenties, Ann began making signifi-

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ANN MOFFITT

cant contributions in the York community. She founded both the VD (Venereal Disease) Education Council and CONTACT York, a 24-hour calling program implemented to meet the needs of the city's citizens.

Ann's father died when she was 16 years old. A year later she married and accepted a full-time position as the health education instructor at the YWCA. Even so, "I was determined to get my degree and I put myself through college. It took me eight years, but in 1972, I graduated with a bachelor of arts in behavioral science from York College of Pennsylvania."

In 1973 Ann took a position in the Cambridge, Massachusetts YWCA. After two years there, she returned to the Harrisburg branch as the executive director in 1975. At 29 years old, she was the agency's youngest executive director. During the seven years Ann held this position, the YWCA raised one million dollars for their capital campaign for a new building program.

Ann's accomplishments are numerous and impressive, but she makes it clear that she could not have achieved them alone. "We can move mountains if we get the right people together. Then when we as individuals receive recognition, we need to turn around and give the credit to all the people who contributed to the success of a project. Understanding the importance of giving recognition is a crucial part of any job. This is especially important when working for not-for-profits with limited resources."

I have experienced Ann's generous spirit firsthand. I first met Ann in 1989, when we were working at Hemlock Girl Scout Council, now Girl Scouts in the Heart of Central Pennsylvania. She joined the Girl Scouts in 1983, and within six years Ann had successfully achieved the council's goal of raising nearly three million dollars for their capital campaign to expand the council building. It was the largest amount of money ever raised by a Girl Scout council at that time. When she reported on the success of the campaign at staff meetings, she always expressed her gratitude for everyone involved and made us feel valued and important.

Ann Moffitt, ACFRE (Advanced Certified Fund Raising Executive), is currently the vice president of Community Development for Keystone Human Services and the CEO of Keystone Partnership. Keystone Human Services is a family of non-profit organizations, dedicated to creating an environment where families and individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism, and mental health issues are valued.

The YWCA, the Girl Scouts of the United States of America, and Keystone Human Services are all advocates for social change. By raising funds to serve organizations dedicated to advancing populations struggling for equality, Ann has provided a service to people from all racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

In addition to her career accomplishments, Ann has generously given her time and talents as a volunteer. She currently serves on the board of directors for The Byrne Health Education Center in York, the Kiwanis Pennsylvania District Foundation, the Pennsylvania Association for Non-Profit Organizations (PANO), and is the convener for the Harrisburg Region Leave a Legacy Effort™. She is also a member of the Estate Planning Council of Central Pennsylvania, Red Land-Fairview Township, the Association of Fund Raising Professionals (AFP) of Central Pennsylvania, Susquehanna Valley Planned Parenthood, and the Kiwanis Club Harrisburg East Shore. In the past, she has served as president of the Central Pennsylvania Chapter of the National Society of Fund Raising Executives, the Junior League of Harrisburg, and the Harrisburg Hospital Auxiliary. Furthermore, Ann has worked with the Chambers of Commerce in both Greater Harrisburg and the West Shore.

In addition to this amazing roster, Ann and her husband of more than 30 years, Dr. George Moffitt, are now extending that generosity even further by acting as a Social Sponsor family, through the International Fellows Sponsor Program through the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. By living her life through joyful giving, she provides the ideal example to encourage others to join her in the kind of selfless service exemplified by Coretta Scott King. ❖

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DIANE CRAWFORD

PAVING THE WAY

by Mikell Worley

“I want to wipe the dust off the lens of those who don’t understand the value of diversity, so they can see more clearly,” Diane Crawford remarks as she reflects on her nomination for the Coretta Scott King Award. “We can all make a difference. This will be an opportunity to educate others about the value of developing and advancing our most important assets – our people.”

Diane Crawford is the Diversity Inclusion and High Performance Manager of Hershey’s Global Operations. In this position, she is responsible for the development and implementation of diversity



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strategies throughout Hershey's worldwide organization. The Hershey Company employs nearly 13,000 employees globally with revenues of nearly five billion dollars for its delectable chocolates and sugar confections.

In 2003, when Diane accepted the position of Diversity and Inclusion Manager for the Hershey Company in Hershey, Pennsylvania, she took a moment to consider the things in her life that had led her there. "My previous position in the Hershey Company had been in operations, not human resources. I joined Hershey as a Quality Assurance Specialist in 1977, continued to advance, and was promoted to Project Change Facilitator in 2000. Because of my personal interest in diversity, I volunteered for an additional role as Hershey's Diversity Council Team Lead for Community Outreach. When I was offered the job as the High Performance Manager, I viewed the position as an exciting new opportunity. I was passionate about diversity and inclusion, but my [experience came] from life, not through a career in human resources.

"My mother and father met in World War II. My mother is Japanese, born and raised, and my father was African American from the Deep South of Alabama. My father was career military so we moved a lot until I was about five years old. We moved to Harrisburg in 1964 and though our community had diversity, there weren't any other African American – Japanese families."

At the time, the people in Diane's neighborhood were predominantly African American, with a small Puerto Rican population. Although there were those with a biracial background, no one else had a Japanese heritage.

"Race was only one aspect of our family's differences. When my mother came to the United States, she did not speak any English at all. She came to America and became a faithful Christian servant, and my father was a devout southern Baptist. My mother cooked traditional Japanese cuisine. When my father got a bonus in pay, he would take her to New York or New Jersey to shop for groceries," Diane laughs. "And the Japanese New Year celebration is very different from the tra-

ditional American New Year celebration." Diane continues, "So as I thought about the current emerging populations, I realized that I grew up with a great appreciation for multicultural lifestyles. I valued both perspectives."

Diane graduated from Harrisburg High School and went on to earn an associate degree in business management from Harrisburg Area Community College, as well as a bachelor's degree in applied behavioral science from Penn State University. This year Diane completed the master's of education program at Penn State, earning yet another degree.

In addition to the impact she has made through her work at Hershey, Diane has a stellar reputation as a volunteer. She has served as the chair of the YWCA's Race Against Racism. She is a board member for the Chinese Cultural Art Institute, the YMCA Camp Curtain Board of Managers, and the Co-Chair of the Harrisburg Regional Chamber of Commerce Business Diversity Council, as well as a member of the Diversity Professionals of Central PA.

Her contributions have been noted, and as a result she has been awarded numerous honors including the Our Community Our Leaders' Award through Estamos Unidos; the Women's Heritage Award through the Urban Connection; and the Hershey President's Award for Outstanding Contributions for her role in implementing a Women's Council. At the first ever Women Leading Women Conference, Diane was presented with the Quality Through Excellence Award for Organizational Excellence. In 2007 she received the YMCA Black Achiever's Volunteer of the Year Award for her five years of mentoring youth, and the following year she received the YWCA's Women of Excellence Award and the NAACP Act-So Award.

Diane's core motivation is her deep respect for all. "I am very proud that part of my journey has been to pioneer such issues as raising awareness, promoting education, and opening doors so that women- and minority-owned businesses can operate on a level playing field. We want an environment where everyone can bring their best and be valued." ❖

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SUSAN SILVER COHEN

IT'S A WAY OF LIFE

by Mikell Worley

When Susan talks about her family and the neighborhood where she grew up, her voice takes a gentle, almost reverent tone. She was born in 1945 in Steelton, Pennsylvania, where her father, Dr. I. O. Silver, worked as a town doctor and where her family was one of the few Jewish families. She developed an early appreciation for the beauty of diversity.

“My father spoke five languages and interacted with people from every ethnic group as Steelton was a true melting pot. He was also devoted to the town, and be-



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SUSAN SILVER
COHEN

cause of his generosity and caring we were very involved with our community. As the physician for the school and for the sports teams, he encouraged students, in particular athletes, to attend college. He stayed connected and continued to support them even after they graduated from high school.”

After she graduated from high school, Susan left Steelton to study sociology and journalism at Syracuse University in upstate New York from 1963 through 1966. She married at the end of her junior year and moved to Hempstead, New York, where she completed a bachelor of arts degree in sociology at Hofstra University in 1967.

Soon after that, Susan came back to Pennsylvania and lived in Carlisle, where she worked with Family and Children Services for two years. Then she spent a year working at the Cumberland County Division of Special Child Services. In 1970, Susan and her husband relocated to Alexandria, Virginia, where she volunteered in the human service field for the next four years.

In 1973, Susan returned to Harrisburg and purchased her current home. In May of that year, she went back to college to work on a master’s degree in psychosocial science. She attended Penn State University at the Capital Campus branch in Middletown.

Susan’s required practicum for her master’s degree project, Women in the Arts, Inc., was visionary, creative, and innovative. It was a non-profit organization, entirely run by volunteers. “During that era, creative women were not being recognized, or given an opportunity to promote their creativity,” remembers Susan.

“Women in the Arts became a statewide organization and in January 1979, we had our first month-long celebration at the State Museum in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, with a juried exhibit. Hundreds of women entered the show, and the final exhibit featured excellent examples of crafts, photography, sculpture, paintings, art, and jewelry. There were film competitions, performing arts, workshops, and opportunities to network.” The artwork by the women

represented there displayed a wealth of diversity and featured art from all ethnicities.

Women in the Arts, Inc., continued until 1984. Juried exhibits were displayed every January, with an annual attendance of 10,000 visitors for the month. Throughout the year there were workshops featuring marketing, fundraising, grant writing, and publicity.

The statewide project ended in 1985. “We had reached our goals. The organization had served its purpose,” Susan proudly states. It is impossible to measure the quantum leaps forward that resulted from Susan’s vision. The value of Women in the Arts, Inc., is evident by the recognition creative women now receive.

During the time that Women in the Arts was in operation, Susan worked as press secretary for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission from November 1980 until 1993. In that role, she coordinated communication and public relations efforts for 27 historic sites and museums throughout the state, including historic preservation programs through the State Archives. In May 1993, the speaker of the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives appointed her as executive director of the Bipartisan Management Committee, a position she held until June of 2007.

Susan currently works as a freelance writer for the Harrisburg *Patriot-News* and serves on the board of directors for Pinnacle Hospital and Pinnacle Health Systems. She has participated on numerous boards for more than 20 years, including the Jewish Home of Greater Harrisburg and Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet Board.

Susan’s love and inclusion for all people is not just a philosophy, it is a way of life. Susan married Walter W. Cohen in 1986 and together, they have four children and seven grandchildren. In her article “An American (Vietnamese, Jewish, Catholic) Story,” published in the July 2, 2010, issue of the *Patriot-News*, Susan describes the wealth of cultural diversity in her family. Susan and Walter are also “foster” parents and grandparents to a local Vietnamese family. ❖

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HELEN SPENCE

WORKING TOGETHER, MAKING IT BETTER

by Mikell Worley

Helen Spence, her husband Gregg, and their four sons arrived in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on August 12, 1998, a day that would exceed their expectations. “Everything came together in one day! I was unpacking boxes and preparing for the settlement on our home that was scheduled for that afternoon, when the doorbell rang. I thought it was the realtor, but it was Jeff Patton, offering me a job working with my husband in Juvenile Probation in Dauphin County.”

Their move to Harrisburg had been kind of a fluke. Helen’s childhood friend, Lavinia Dupree, had seven years earlier moved

to the Harrisburg area from their childhood community in Philadelphia. During that time Helen had visited Lavonia occasionally, and on one particular visit, Helen's friend announced that there was a house for sale close to her. Lavonia knew that Helen and Gregg were looking to relocate, because of the escalating violence in the city of Philadelphia.

"There was no 'for sale' sign, just a man standing in front of the house, watering the lawn. He seemed to be waiting for us. He allowed us to walk through the house. When we had finished, I talked to my husband, and we decided to buy it and relocate. Shortly afterwards, Gregg and I applied for positions with Juvenile Justice." Both Helen and Greg had careers as juvenile probation officers in Philadelphia. Helen had worked for 12 years in the juvenile special offenders department, and Gregg had spent four years in the electronic monitoring unit. Dauphin County "wanted him but not me," Helen laughs. "Gregg told them it was a two for one sale. He wanted me to work with him. He was told, 'we've never done that!'"

Nevertheless, on August 12, both Helen and Gregg were offered positions. Helen promptly accepted and never looked back. She worked as a juvenile probation court intake worker until 2005. During her last three years there, Helen was selected by the chief of juvenile probation to work with the Dauphin County Commissioners, judges, and administrators on developing and implementing strength-based practice through Family Group Conferencing. Strength-based practice encourages people to focus on their personal strengths, and then use those strengths to solve whatever problem they are facing. It shifts the mindset from deficit-based thinking to strength-based thinking.

Family Group Conferencing is a concept that originated from the Maori of New Zealand. When there is a conflict, families and community members come together to discuss solutions, agree upon expectations, and set up a support system for the parties involved. Implementing this collective planning tool on a local level has been instrumental in keeping thousands of young people out of the system in Dauphin County since 2002.

In 2004, Dauphin County was given the opportunity to expand its strength-based practice through a five-year Systems of Care federal grant. In her position as the Systems of Care Community Liaison Specialist for Dauphin County, Helen was appointed to develop and implement the infrastructure changes in the community for the grant.

Focusing on strengths was a familiar concept to Helen. She was born and raised in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and describes feeling blessed in all aspects of her life including home, school, and community. Helen is the youngest of three children with an older brother and sister. Her father was a foreman in a large corporation and her mother was a nurse, a profession Helen considered entering.

"We had a very progressive school system that offered core subjects in the morning and career tracking in the afternoon. I considered a number of career options including the health field, social services, and human service work.

"I had the opportunity to meet Miss Earlene Satisfield, the director of the John Bartram School for Human Services. She took an interest in all of her students. We weren't allowed to say, 'I can't do it.' She knew math wasn't my forte. She said, 'You may learn differently but you can learn. We'll figure out a way you can learn.' And we did!"

Helen has used this "can do" approach to encourage others throughout her career. "Systems of Care uses this practice as the foundational practice that shares the same values and beliefs, but expands the concept from the nuclear family to the entire community coming together for a solution."

Watching Helen orchestrate resources is pure poetry. She compares it to baking a cake. "Eggs and butter aren't enough to make a cake. You need all the ingredients working together." Helen puts this philosophy into practice when she gathers all segments of the community to work together for a common goal. The Dauphin County Systems of Care now has five subcommittees including Faith, Community, Youth, Cultural Competency, and Family, with more than 300 members. "We work together to utilize their expertise, resources, and services to assist people in need that come to their attention from the community or the child welfare system. In 2006 this expanded to summer enrichment camps for youth, beginning with 60 youth in one site and expanding to nine sites with 300 youth."

In addition to her hard work outside of her home, Helen and Gregg adopted five boys between October 1998 and 2004. "Our nine sons have truly blessed and enriched our lives," Helen notes. Indeed, we are all indebted to Ms. Lavonia for bringing Helen Spence and her family to this community. Her contribution to youth, families, and communities is immeasurable. Helen sure knows how to bake a cake! ❖