

MARGARET DAVITT
1929-2020

It wasn't long after I arrived at SMOC when I realized that Margaret Davitt had given me a gift.

Simply put, she reminded me of why I had chosen this profession of helping others. Fourteen years out of the military, twelve years out of graduate school and, most importantly, ten years after a soul-crushing experience that had nearly killed me, there was Margaret gently reminding me on a daily basis to celebrate one of my major life choices.

I was in good company. Simply put, there was a joy in Margaret that radiated outward, with her staff at Head Start and Child Care, the children in those programs and the guys that wound up at our Detox. It was impossible to miss. It shone like the sun. It was infectious. That feeling that Margaret rekindled in me and so many others remains with me 35 years later.

Watching Margaret move through her life experience on a daily basis was a wonder. Like others touched by these experiences, I cherished our personal and professional friendship.

I want to touch on a couple of conversations that Margaret and I had over the years to illustrate the depth of her commitment to mission-oriented work in so many roles.

The first occurred early in my tenure at the Friendly's over in Nobscot where we'd meet on an occasional Friday for "supervision." At this meeting I had an agenda - I wanted her to cut down the time she was working as the Detox Nurse (she'd work overnights and entire weekends). After all, Child Care was more than a full-time job.

Maggie, instead of pleading, negotiating or telling me to buzz off, launched into an utterly hilarious story of how she got herself transported to our Detox during the Blizzard of '78.

On the back of a snowmobile courtesy of the Framingham Police Department.

There is honor in defeat, a mantra I would repeat to Margaret whenever her viewpoint prevailed in numerous times over the years, much to both of our amusements.

On a recent video chat I held with the Voices Against Violence staff, I found myself telling the VAV team how their program had become a part of our organization. Their program had become part of our organization in the early 90's.

"Wow, so you see we had this Deputy Director. It was like 30 years ago. Her name was Margaret Davitt. She actually just retired a couple of years back. 50 years she worked for us. At the time, Domestic Violence services were being provided by another agency and we were collaborating with them to try and open up the first Battered Women's Shelter in the Metrowest. Suddenly, we learned that this agency was going to close its doors. Margaret comes to me and says, and I quote, 'Jim, we have a moral responsibility to make sure these services continue in the community. You have to make it happen.' That was 30 years ago."

With so many things, Margaret's aim was true.

When we left the second floor of 36 Concord, we moved over to 354 Waverly Street, virtually right around the corner. The building we relocated to had railroad tracks running through the front of the property. One Friday morning I arrived to a group of people with police cars surrounding them in front of the building by the railroad tracks. Next to the railroad tracks, a body covered with a tarp rested. One of the "frequent flyers" at the Detox. I'm not there a minute when Margaret steams up to me, fire in her eyes. "Jim, they won't let me see Richie. The cops won't let me look at him and say goodbye to him."

"Come on Margaret. Let's go see if we can make that happen."

Margaret practiced "EVERYBODY MATTERS" every day of her life.

About 15 years ago when Margaret was beginning to wind down her career, she settled into the role of Director of our Turning Point Shelter. I had my doubts. She was in her mid-70's at the time. Those doubts were quickly dispelled. A day after one of our guests dropped dead in the Day Room, I pick up the phone and call Margaret to "process out" what happened and how she was doing. There was no processing. Instead, there was a long discussion about sadness and how it impacts the lives of disabled and disadvantaged people. It was truly a remarkable conversation.

I've always struggled to gain a true understanding of how Margaret Davitt moved through the world as a remarkable and refreshing presence. An Irish Catholic kid, born at the dawn of the Depression, she became a Nurse at the State Hospital, married a

Framingham cop and had two kids, a boy, Tom and a girl, Paula. She became a widow in her mid-30's when her beloved husband died from a genetic illness. She arrived at SMOC in her mid-30's, the fifth employee the agency ever hired. And from that point on, she lived and breathed SMOC's mission.

Margaret was deeply religious, but we didn't talk much about her beliefs. I knew she drew on a remarkable reservoir of faith ingrained with a sparkling sense of humor and a singular intuitive sense of people, places and situations.

So, how do I explain the profound impact she had on me and so many others? After much reflection, I found myself returning to the precepts of Catholic social teaching. She truly was the living embodiment of what her faith demanded from her in how she moved through the world. It is not hyperbolic to compare Margaret to Dorothy Day. Like many others, who are destined to walk in the material world along these paths, I find it limiting to simply categorize her in the context of a belief system. There is truly a universality to the path she took through life. One day recently, I was reading the words of a Sufi scholar who was attempting to articulate the viewpoint of his faith. This is how I understood it. All religions originate from a sole source. Think of them as rays of sunshine from the same sun. Somehow, I think that's what Margaret believed when it came to religion. Her beliefs and the beliefs of others, no matter how different, were overlapping rays of sunshine.

Margaret Davitt wore the mask of God.

Jim Cuddy

July, 2020

