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A publication of

LifePath
options for independence

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THE GOOD LIFE

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My Thirty Years with Meals on Wheels

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I became a Meals on Wheels (MOW) driver in the spring of 1994. (This spring will be 30 years!) Prior to this time I had left work with a for-profit company that I had been with for 13 years. I had left because my husband's parents needed daily help in the home and I felt it was right that I should do it. I knew nothing about caring for the elderly specifically but I just jumped in and figured I would do it unless I reached a point that it was beyond my being able to do it. I suddenly became versed in doctor's appointments, medications, and general needs of elderly folks. I took care of my in-laws for a year and they both passed away in the same calendar year. At that point my kids were young, and I really didn't want to go back to work full-time, an hour away. I became a Girl Scout leader, a 4-H leader, took schoolkids on field trips, and began to help at the school book sales. What fun!

But, I felt like the previous year had been a real education for me and I felt like I had a much better understanding of what things are important for elders to be able to continue to live in their own home. I felt perhaps I had something to offer to other area seniors, but what could I do to help? It had to be something that would

mesh into my kid's school schedule and my husband's work schedule. I began to think of the fact that I had activities where I was interacting with kids, but no interaction with seniors anymore, which I missed. Seniors are so amazing if you just take the time to listen and learn from them!

I saw a block ad in *The Recorder* looking for MOW drivers. This was something I could do to help area seniors stay in their own home, which is what I always thought was important, and the timing would fit perfectly into my day. No one would miss me! The kids would be at school and I could go deliver meals!

I called Franklin County Home Care Corp. (now LifePath) and asked how I could get involved with delivering meals. I talked to Carol Sicley, who was in the Nutrition Department at the time, and she told me to come in to apply. The rest, as they say, is history.

Back in those days you were allowed to bring your kids with you (you are not allowed now due to agency insurance reasons) and in the summer they would

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go with me a lot of times. I really felt it was good for kids to spend time with older adults to have the interaction of the different generations. I think many kids don't have that opportunity and they may be afraid of the elderly because they've not had that exposure.

I became a MOW driver out of the Shelburne Senior Center. I did 5 days a week, 78 miles a day, and did it for 5 years, never missing a day. I would report to the senior center to tray up our meals in the kitchen and while I would be doing that, my daughter Kate, age 7 when I began, and older daughter Sara, age 11, would be at a table in the corner playing cards with the seniors! They taught them how to play. When my meals were packed up, we'd leave to go deliver. The people on the route loved seeing the kids. How a senior lights up when kids are involved! They got to know my daughters and long after they stopped going with me, the seniors who were still on the route would ask about them. After I was a driver, I became

the site manager at Shelburne which I did for 7 years, and sometimes when we were without a driver I would take a route out. This is when people would ask about my kids.

Delivering meals is really special. It is a certain commitment you have made, a certain feeling when you are doing it. The seniors are really special. We get to know them. We care about them. Many times we come into their lives when they are nearing the end of theirs and we get to know them and their history in reverse. The longer we deliver to them the further back in their lives we get to know them. I saw this time and again. They would share some really amazing stories. Many times as I was walking out the door from a delivery, after they had thanked me for delivering their meal, I thought "I'm the lucky one." Truly.

I remember a man that told me when he saw the first automobile go by his house. They all ran outside to see it go by. Can you imagine? So I'm listening to someone who is recounting the first car they saw. Pretty amazing.

Another time a MOW consumer told me how he bought a car by accident. It was a city location and there was going to be a used car auction. He and lots of people went just to see and gawk because it was such a rarity to see the cars. Somehow during the auction he got excited and raised his hand. He then realized he had just bought a car. He was not at driving age, not that there was a driving age at that point, but they got the car home and they all learned how to drive it.

Oh the stories I remember! In the years I was a driver I had been down every road in West County and can point at many homes and remember who used to live there. Great memories. I'm remembering them now! I could write a book.

Seniors are just so special and they should be honored and taken care of by us, the younger generation. That is what our agency does and that is what our drivers do. If you are a MOW driver, you benefit by knowing that the volunteer work you did today helped someone stay in their own home by receiving our nutritious meal and a wellness check. If you are a MOW recipient, you benefit by receiving delicious meals to keep you healthy and by having a friendly interaction with our drivers. If you are the family member of an elder receiving Meals on Wheels lunches, you have the benefit of peace of mind that your loved one is receiving a hot lunch today and a wellness check.

Come join us and become a MOW driver. Mileage and stipend offered. Call 413-773-5555 or visit www.lifepathma.org and click on "Support Our Mission."

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