

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE CATHY MCFARLAND HARVEY



On this day we induct into the Frost Valley Hall of Fame a strong and effective woman—a self-described “constant troublemaker” for the good cause of diversity and equal opportunity—who as much as anyone was responsible for the creation, four decades ago, of the various partnerships with communities in Newark that continue to this day at the core of our “camperships” project. Through her leadership at the Victoria Foundation and, since 1999, her membership of the Frost Valley Board of Trustees, Cathy McFarland Harvey has been a tireless advocate for the once-radical idea that two weeks at camp for children from families struggling with poverty can have a long-lasting positive effect—not just on the child, but on her family back home and, perhaps counter intuitively, on all the people of the camp.

Cathy had led the campaign to integrate the Montclair public schools, having fought the necessary political battles in Trenton and managed complex relationship-building back home. Howard Quirk, legendary executive director of the Victoria Foundation, took notice of these achievements and knew he’d discovered exactly the person he wanted to help him with the progressive work of the foundation. He showed up at Cathy’s house and persuaded her to join him as a staff member, not deterred in the least by the fact that Cathy was raising two children and continued with local political projects; they set up a flex arrangement that was itself aligned with the spirit of Victoria’s approach. Remembering Howard Quirk’s unusual personal visit, hat in hand, Cathy recently recalled this remarkable man (who precedes her into our Hall of Fame): “Howard was the most

unforgettable person I have ever met. He was my friend, my mentor. He took this novice and gave her all these great experiences. Had Howard not knocked on my door that day, I would have missed out on the world of non profit leadership as exemplified at Frost Valley.”

In 1972 Cathy and Howard received an unusual letter from someone named Halbe Brown, then in his sixth year as Executive Director of Frost Valley YMCA. Howard was uncertain of the tone of the approach. But Cathy’s son had been to Camp Wawayanda and then there was the Montclair connection...and, what’s more: there was something very special—generous and aggressively visionary and yet disarmingly humble—about this man Halbe Brown. Cathy urged Howard to spend a weekend at camp with her at Halbe’s invitation. They were shown the magic of camp in session. They stood in Lake Cole up to their knees, watching children splashing and playing with their counselors and having the time of their lives—and then realized how much more diverse the program could be. Halbe learned of Cathy’s involvement with St. James Academy, a school in Newark for kids who had dropped out of Newark’s public schools; they had potential but didn’t thrive in the conventional education system. It was Halbe’s idea that they should all visit Frost Valley for a weekend. They did and loved the experience—but unfortunately some of the boys broke into the camp store and stole a box of Frost Valley sweatshirts. Cathy keenly observed Halbe’s response and thus had her first lesson in the uniqueness of the signature Frost Valley mode of tolerance and inclusion. This was not the time for accusation and punitive moralism; instead, it became what

Halbe called “a teachable moment,” and in the end the children left with the memory of a great fun weekend, a long passionate discussion about ways of seeking equality, and a palpable sense of what a forgiving, beautiful place can do for kids—and, on top of it all, a gift of the sweatshirts for all the participants as they returned home, proudly emblazoned with “FROST VALLEY.”

The next step was the very first of what is now at Frost Valley known as the partnership model. Frost Valley and Victoria Foundation created three-way relationships with Newark agencies and organizations that in turn worked closely (at the neighborhood and school level) with the families of Newark: St. Columbus School, Ironbound Community Corporation, the Protestant Community Center, La Casa de Don Pedro, and others. Howard and Cathy worked closely with each agency, identifying children in particular need of camp, conducting health screenings and, crucially, working with parents (who were understandably nervous about the project)—and prepared each child for two or four weeks at camp. Victoria retained a coordinator who worked closely with the camp directors: at various times Dorothy Knauer, the super-talented Sister Mary, and others. Frost Valley’s campers and counselors of that era will never forget the resilience and spunk of the Quiñones children, regulars at camp by then, during the summer in which their mother suddenly died; they were accompanied that session by Sister Mary and were embraced and supported absolutely everywhere they went around camp. Cathy remembers that

the work of those summers was, in essence, “to nurture vigilantly.” “You had to be always on top of it,” she says. “And you had to be prepared to be moved. That is the most wonderful thing about Frost Valley.”

When Howard Quirk retired in 1989, Cathy became Victoria’s Chief Executive Officer and directed the foundation magnificently for eighteen years. It had taken a few summers for the partnership approach to move from fragile progressive experiment to robust ongoing community-based project. The model invented in the early 1970s continues today. Cathy doubts that it would have succeeded without Frost Valley as a partner. But her many friends, colleagues, and admirers at Frost Valley know that it would not have taken hold without her positive forcefulness, her political vision, her belief always in the primacy of “the public good,” and her sense that children learn best in a setting where positive values are (in her phrase) “simply in the air.” “You go out into the fields, into the various activities,” Cathy observed during a recent walk around camp, “and you see wonderful things happening with kids. And the beautiful thing is: the kids are not even realizing that they are learning. It just happens.”

For her unflagging advocacy of families in need of support and encouragement; for her stewardship of a vital, gift-giving organization created for the public good; for her unique understanding of the power of education “that just happens”; and for her integrity and strong opinions as a Frost Valley Trustee—her Trustee colleagues gladly and unanimously induct Cathy McFarland Harvey into the Frost Valley Hall of Fame.