

The Tangible Fruits of Giving Back

by Deirdre Norman

In 1974, in a Salvation Army Home and Hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma, a very young mother gave birth to a boy and made the difficult choice to put him up for adoption. That baby boy — who was adopted by teachers in El Reno, Oklahoma, and named Lyle Hedgecock — eventually retired from a career in the US Air Force and decided to become a lawyer. After passing the bar, he attended the Virginia State Bar’s Harry L. Carrico Professionalism Course in 2017 where he crossed paths with one of the Salvation Army’s longest serving volunteers, Fairfax family lawyer William L. Schmidt.

This circuitous chain of connections led to an e-mail in which Hedgecock thanked Schmidt for his efforts on behalf of others at the Salvation Army, and wrote, “The good that we do in people’s lives is never totally visible to us. So, it is up to those like me to share the kindness we’ve received with those Good Samaritans, that they may continue their work emboldened. I hope this note emboldens you.”

“It brought me to tears,” Schmidt says of the e-mail. “I was so touched by his story and so humbled by it.” Schmidt, 71, of William L. Schmidt & Associates PLC, has held many leadership positions in the VSB, and he often addresses new lawyers about service to the bar, to the community, and finding one’s passion in life. He focuses much of his comments on the rewards he gets from helping others, and in particular his activities for the Salvation Army. “When I was about six years old,” Schmidt says, “and my father was a low-paid warrant officer for the Army stationed in Australia, it was the Salvation Army who stepped in to help my parents make Christmas special for our family.”

Schmidt has rung the bell during the holidays for the Salvation Army for twenty-five



Hedgecock with his family on the day of his adoption

years now in front of the same Giant grocery store in Fairfax where he begins two weeks before Thanksgiving and rings until a week before Christmas every single Saturday for anywhere from eight to ten hours a day. He does this, as well as running an annual food drive that has collected as much as nine tons of food at one time for the Salvation Army during the holidays.

“We live in often cynical times,” says Hedgecock. “When people do things philanthropically, they don’t often see the fruits of their labor and they may doubt they are achieving anything. I wanted Bill Schmidt to know that people like him make a difference in others’ lives and so I told him my story.”



Hedgecock



Schmidt

It is said that there are no coincidences in life, and these two men share more than a few commonalities: both served in the US Air Force, both attended American University for law school, both speak of their love of the law as a means of helping others and in particular children, and both speak of the way in which the Salvation Army has changed their lives.

“The most important thing is the children,” says Schmidt. “From my position as bell ringer, I can see that it’s also the children who still understand that with their gift they can help the world. They have no cynicism.” In 2009, Schmidt’s continuous span of bell ringing landed him on the front page of *USA Today*. He says that his volunteerism has also helped his law practice immeasurably. “In the Salvation Army, you meet people at their level of need. It develops a sense of empathy that benefits my law practice tremendously.”

As for Hedgecock, his first interaction with the legal system was when he was 18 years old and an Oklahoma judge unsealed his adoption records. Today, he says that his birth mother is “a big part” of his life. A member of the Fairfax Bar Association, which has a

strong tradition of pro bono work in family matters for indigent people, Hedgecock will use his military experience to practice mostly in government contracts work, but he is passionate about giving back as well. He volunteers at the Joint Base Andrews Legal Office helping service men and women with legal issues, and he just completed a child custody CLE and plans to use his spare time to do pro bono child custody work.

Hedgecock says that people like Schmidt “...don’t often see the tangible fruits of what they’ve done. It’s like a study — you wait twenty years and you see what happens.”

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