

A Tide of Love and Unity

It was a very sacred moment in time. The Spirit of God was in that place – the dining room of Mountain View Health Care in Elkhorn City, Kentucky, on Monday afternoon, September 26. The facility – indeed, the entire community – was reeling from tragic events of a few days earlier. A beloved associate of Mountain View, a nurse with a tenure of 25 years, had been slain by her son, wielding a rifle in the aftermath of drug abuse.

Everyone who knew the family, prominent in the community, wondered how such a thing could happen. And so the associates of Mountain View had gathered in a memorial service for Shirley Hackney, 44, to grieve over her passing and to share in their tears. But more than anything else, they had come together to celebrate Shirley's unselfishness, her character and the positive impact she had made on all those she encountered.

The trail of terror began when Matthew Hackney, 17, a senior at East Ridge High School, where he was an honor student with a 3.8 grade-point average, bought 15 Ultrams, a prescription painkiller, from an adult and took seven of them after a sleepless night. When he failed two sobriety tests, school officials turned Hackney over to police with the recommendation that he be incarcerated. Since all Pike County judges were attending a judicial conference, the boy was brought before a trial commissioner, who sent him home with his mother instead of to a detention center.

In the carport of their home, Hackney shot his mother, his father, Ivan Hackney, 47, and his grandmother, Wilma Hackney, 63. Fleeing from police, he crashed his pickup truck into a city-owned vehicle driven by Terry Taylor, 41, Elkhorn City's water superintendent.

"You've got to understand about the boy," said Pike County Schools Superintendent Frank Welch. "He basically was a good kid." Assistant Superintendent Paul David Dotson reported that school officials "never had any trouble out of that kid."

Sharon Hall, executive director of Mountain View, described Shirley as "just a very caring person" who started as a certified nursing assistant on July 31, 1980, fresh out of high school. She maintained the job while attending school to become a licensed practical nurse. As a charge nurse, Shirley "worked very well with staff, and they respected her in every way."

Hall said Shirley didn't mind a challenge. "If someone was having a problem with bathing or eating, Shirley could make it happen. She was soft-spoken, but could be stern when it was required."

(more)

Her children and her residents were the focus of her life. An example, Hall said, was a man who was admitted about a year ago. "No one thought he would make it, but Shirley took a personal interest in him." She gave him more of her time and her encouragement. Now, the man is making plans to go home. The reason, all agree, was Shirley.

Mountain View was where her heart was. She demonstrated it with her actions. Shirley had been named employee of the year and winner of Whatever It Takes awards for service that went above and beyond her job responsibilities.

As the Monday memorial service unfolded, songs of faith and homegoing for believers, the reading of scripture and tributes from fellow workers gave testimony to a life of devotion to others. Debbie Darnell, a registered nurse at Pikeville Medical Center and a former certified nursing assistant at Mountain View, recalled how Shirley had been offered a job at the hospital – most likely for more money – but she turned it down, saying: "I'll be here until the doors close or until they carry me out."

Shirley Hackney leaves behind two other children: Lisa, a senior at Eastern Kentucky University, and Jason, a junior at East Ridge High School. Mountain View Health Care has established a memorial fund for them. Checks should be made payable to The Children of Shirley Hackney Fund, and mailed to U.S. Bank, Elkhorn City Office, 114 W. Russell Street, Elkhorn City, Kentucky 41522. Contacts at the bank are Cheryl Ramey or Hope Ramey, telephone number (606) 754-5082. All donations will be used solely for the benefit of these two children. As important as the money will be to them, however, these two youngsters need our prayers. Please pray for the peace and comfort that only God's grace can bestow, and – absent an earthly mother and father – the wisdom and direction of a Heavenly Father.

And in that little dining room at Mountain View, where Shirley often walked and hugged and laughed, a tide of love and unity washed over us all. Regional Vice President Mary Pankey and Chairman Forrest L. Preston joined with Sharon Hall in reminding the assemblage that we are one great family.

And it is a family that is richer because of Shirley Hackney.

--Beecher Hunter