

## ***Darlene Johnson Nix: Knowing How to Serve, How to Cry, How to Love, How to Speak Your Truth***

*Darlene Johnson Nix lives part of the year in both Yuma, Arizona and Casper, Wyoming. One of 12 children born to Art and Mabel Johnson in Grandville, North Dakota, Darlene is the mother of two children and the grandmother of two. Both she and her husband, Fred, enjoy serving others and Darlene remains active*



*as both a Hospice and community volunteer. We met Darlene standing outside of recreation center in her trailer community in Yuma and were invited back to her trailer for tea.*

Darlene Johnson Nix is a short woman with a big personality and an even bigger heart. But throughout her adult life, Darlene had to face an obstacle common to many other women.

“Probably throughout my life, the one thing that may not be difficult for some people, but it was for me; is my size - my shortness,” she said. “And so to overcome that you try to use more of your personality, or other strengths that you have, so people look more at that than your size.”

At just under five feet tall, Darlene always aspired to being five foot three. “Size shouldn’t matter, but it has mattered to me.”

Being raised on a farm in North Dakota, Darlene never had much of an opportunity to travel as a young girl. “There were 12 of us kids, so if you got to go seven miles from town, you had gone a long ways. So I used to sit around and dream about going to a different state.”

Darlene said her parents were “very, very poor people” and as a young child she believed money was the key to happiness. “I thought if you had money, it would be the answer to all things, and of course money is not the answer to all things.”

Through her life experience, Darlene learned that the key to her happiness has come in service. “I do a lot of volunteering. My whole thing in life is to be able to help someone else and see them smile. I just know that I am in better health and better condition than they are, and I just love to help other people through volunteering. That is my whole focus since I retired. That is one of the things that probably would be one of my strengths.”

Darlene volunteers with cancer patients in Hospice care. “I go visit the patients and take them whatever they need. Or I just visit them and hold their hands,” she said. She also volunteers at a local hospital. “I visit one floor of heart patients to see what I can do to make their life better. And I’m in the Angel Program that also serves people with cancer, taking them a meal on the day they receive treatment or baking cookies and leaving them on their doorstep. I love volunteering. I just love it.”

For strength and support in her life, Darlene draws on friends, family and God. “Sometimes friends are as important as family, because you can speak to things to friends that you don’t speak to family, and vice versa. To me they are both very important, and that is where I get my strength to draw from.”

“The main thing is that I just use God’s strength to overcome difficulties,” she said. “Death of family members to me is very, very hard to overcome. So I just ask God for strength to get through it. I recently lost my little auntie that my husband Fred and I have taken care of for years and years, so I just pray every day for God’s help, and know that she is still here with us.”

Darlene said the most important accomplishment in her life “was marrying my husband, because he is one in a million. When they made him they threw away the mold. So he is probably my best accomplishment, because I got him over anybody else.”

And as for regrets, Darlene said her biggest regret is that there are people who have passed on that she wishes she had spent more time telling how much she loved them.”Or just that I was maybe a little bit better listener than I was, instead of thinking about me, thinking about them.”

“I would just hope that I never hurt anyone, because that is not what I’d like to do. But we all sometimes say things that are hurtful that we shouldn’t have said. So I think that would be the biggest regret - if I hurt someone or if I didn’t express my feelings better to them - particularly a dying person that I failed to tell them enough times how special they were, so that they could leave this earth knowing that they were OK people.”

As for advice for the next generation, Darlene quoted the poet Emily Dickenson. “She always said, ‘If in one day I could make someone smile today, then my life is complete.’”

“I think for our young people, no matter who they are, they need to know how to love someone. They need to know how to cry and they need to know that it’s OK to express your feelings. Whether it be about politics or about life, they need to be able to express that without being fearful of being reprimanded for doing so.”

As for maintaining a happy marriage, Darlene said the most important ingredient for happiness is what you are willing to give. “I just think that when you meet someone that you have to be willing to give 99 percent and only take one percent back. And if you can do that, or can see that quality in him, then I would say you found the right person. And first of all, he has to be your best friend. From there you can develop a relationship. And of course to me, honesty is a number one thing. If you can’t be honest with each other then you just shouldn’t be pretending thinking that it’s OK when it’s not.”

“My husband is that type of guy,” she said. “He gives 99 percent and I take one. And hopefully I return that. When you go into a marriage you have to know that you have to give and hope that you get the same back – but if you don’t, then don’t be disappointed. Take the one percent and be totally content.”

And Darlene stressed that faith – no matter what religion someone practices - and hard work, are two other key ingredients for a happy life. “Hard work is so important. You mustn’t be afraid of hard work. And it’s important to be able to take advice from someone and use it as a growing tool, rather than getting angry. I think we were taught that, growing up.”