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SAVANNAH COMMUNITY MEMORIES PROJECT
“FAITH IN ACTION” RESIDENCY
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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PRODUCER: MICKEY YOUMANS

SUBJECT: MALENA STONE



Malena Stone

12:07:54:05 [Eric Darling]: Thank you. I'm sorry. And after Mickey settles, Tom Okay. The phone gets answered. Quiet phone. That's enough of you. Okay. I think we're good. Alright. We're good? Yep.

12:08:17:06 [Tom Kohler]: Good afternoon.

12:08:18:11 [Malena Stone]: Good afternoon.

12:08:20:04 [Tom Kohler]: Now the first question I've got is a hard one.

12:08:22:04 [Malena Stone]: Okay.

12:08:22:13 [Tom Kohler]: Alright. I would like for you to say your name and if you'd say, my name is, and say your name and also spell it, please. Okay.

12:08:30:05 [Malena Stone]: My name is Malena Stone. It's M-A-L-E-N-A, stone, S-T-O-N-E.

12:08:37:16 [Tom Kohler]: And is it possible that you have what's called a preferred pronoun?

12:08:43:04 [Malena Stone]: She, woman, her. Thank you.

12:08:45:20 [Tom Kohler]: That's great. And would like to just start if I could, with some questions about you. Okay. And what I'm interested in is, and, and you can take this at whatever level you want to, where are you from and how did you get to where you are now?

12:09:03:15 [Malena Stone]: I am a Savannah native. I was born and raised right here in Savannah. Left for college and graduate school and came right back home.

Malena Stone

12:09:12:09 [Tom Kohler]: And how were you, how were you, how were you schooled here in Savannah when you were growing up?

12:09:17:15 [Malena Stone]: So, I was a public school kid. We were a fairly poor family, so we lived in some, all, pretty much any of the areas of town where you could live cheaply and house a lot of children. So we tended to go to just neighborhood schools and pretty much just came up through the Savannah Chatham County School system. And

12:09:40:20 [Tom Kohler]: Then, do you mind just saying what schools you went to? Sure.

12:09:43:15 [Malena Stone]: So let's see, see if I can re remember back that far. So I started out at Charles Herty Elementary School, which is no longer there. And then went to Pennsylvania Avenue School, which is also no longer there. And from there I went to Anderson Street School downtown, which is now a SCAD building, and went to Myers Middle School and graduated from Johnson High School.

12:10:12:14 [Tom Kohler]: And when did you graduate?

12:10:13:04 [Malena Stone]: 1993.

12:10:15:12 [Tom Kohler]: '93, So you were in public school. The public schools have been fully integrated by then?

12:10:21:04 [Malena Stone]: Yes sir.

12:10:22:19 [Tom Kohler]: And, and graduated in ninety three. And then you come from your, you're an only child?

Malena Stone

12:10:30:13 [Malena Stone]: I come from a family of five, so I am the oldest of four girls and then we have one older brother.

12:10:38:06 [Tom Kohler]: And where'd you go to college and all that?

12:10:41:04 [Malena Stone]: So I went to Berry College up in Rome, Georgia. And you know, I was kind of the poor kid of the bunch. So took the Greyhound bus to college and went to graduate school at Valdosta State and majored in speech language pathology with a specialization in early intervention because I've always loved children and always have wanted to, you know, impact children in some way. So for a while I thought I wanted to work in the medical field, but it turns out I don't like bad smells or

12:11:15:10 blood. So that was not a good fit for me.

12:11:19:06 [Eric Darling]: Melina, I'm sorry, you have one stray hair.

12:11:21:18 [Malena Stone]: Okay. So

12:11:22:09 [Eric Darling]: On your other side, sorry, it's like just, it's sort of in front of your ear.

12:11:28:05 [Malena Stone]: Okay. Let's see.

12:11:30:03 [Eric Darling]: Can you help her with

12:11:30:20 [Malena Stone]: That real quick? You see it? I'm sorry. No, it's one of those, this is one right here. Right. I appreciate it because it would drive you cra drive me crazy later. It is right there. Go back and move that little piece. Is that better?

12:11:43:03 [Eric Darling]: Got it, got it. Excellent. Thank you. Sorry about that.

Malena Stone

12:11:46:12 [Malena Stone]: No.

12:11:48:09 [Eric Darling]: Anyway, I'm sorry. Go ahead. Continue, Tom. Thanks.

12:11:51:13 [Tom Kohler]: Let me go back a little bit to, to family life. If I may. Tell me a little bit about your dad and your mom, but tell me a little bit about their, their personal journeys and their faith journeys as well, if you don't mind.

12:12:05:17 [Malena Stone]: Sure. So I have had a really interesting upbringing I think, compared to other children that I would consider just normal kids, I guess because I really got to see my parents' faith journey from a really early age. My dad or the man I call my dad is really my stepfather. My mom was married before my biological dad was Native American and they did not stay married very long. So Bobby, who I know as my dad

12:12:44:09 came into the picture and my parents were hippies and they openly would tell you that, you know, they just were trying to find their way in life. He was a rock and roll musician, she was a waitress. They were the typical, I think Lifetime movie of just kind of a hippie couple. And, and they really kind of found their way around different religions. They were Hindu

12:13:10:11 for a while and just kind of didn't really, didn't really seem to have a direction in life.

12:13:18:02 [Malena Stone]: And eventually they found their way to the Christian faith and through my mom's twin sister, my aunt Dot. And from there, I think as children we got to see them grow into just really loving, kind people from people who were kind of all over the place. And I think they would say the same thing, that it just kind of gave them a center and, and they just became really compassionate, loving people. And I think as

12:13:50:14 children, when you see that firsthand, that probably influences your life, you know, your entire life and your faith journey. Because when you've seen people without Christ and then you see them with Christ and you see this just huge change in them, I think that really changes just the way that you, you look at faith in general.

Malena Stone

12:14:16:00 [Tom Kohler]: When I think of your dad, I do think of the Kmart parking lot. Do you mind talking about that a little bit?

12:14:21:13 [Malena Stone]: No. So we were kind of the, you know, I, you know, I think we pretty much stuck out in most environments we were in as children because even in 1975 when I was born, there weren't a lot of families that had five children. And in a lot of the school situations we were in, you know, we were the minority children because we lived in the inner city. We lived in some sketchier kind of neighborhoods because that was where we could afford to pay rent. And, and I think because of that we,

12:14:56:10 we grew up with a, maybe a worldview that was maybe a little broader just because we got to see people of all different walks of life and all different cultures from a really early age. And, and you know, we, we were poor. We struggled to survive. I think my parents had four or five jobs at one.

12:15:19:07 [Malena Stone]: You know, one point everything from, at one point my dad had a shrimp truck, which my, my mom, she's a really amazing person in every way, but she has always just taught us that we could do anything in life, you know, and they, I don't feel like as children we ever had any limits. And so she would say, you're smart. Go figure it out. You know, that kind of thing. And so, you know, we saw her rebuild my dad's shrimp

12:15:52:13 truck engine. Yeah. They couldn't afford to fix it, so she just figured out how to rebuild it. She fiberglassed the floor and installed plumbing and, you know, just things you don't traditionally see a mom do in the seventies and eighties. And so, you know, she built bookshelves, she sewed, she cooked, she painted, she could do it all and made it all look easy and just taught us to just figure out what we wanted to do and do it, you know,

12:16:20:11 which was great. And so, you know, we at one point and just outta necessity, the children were always involved in, you know, fundraising for the family because we had to pay the light bill and, you know, all this. So at one point in time, my sister and I still fondly remember our journey of selling plumes in the Kmart parking lot. They were these very long feather decor items. And yeah,

12:16:54:23 so we've done a little bit of everything from shrimp, shrimp beheading to plume selling, but, but you know, they're really fun memories. And I think we were always a really close family and my, my three sisters and I especially, but, and my brother too. But we have always remained really close and I think partially because we were always, you know, together and

12:17:17:06 always kind of on a team trying to help the family make it so it's good.

Malena Stone

12:17:23:16 [Tom Kohler]: What I remember about that is seeing the dad and he would've his bible open

12:17:28:09 [Malena Stone]: Yes. In the

12:17:29:02 [Tom Kohler]: Truck. And that, I mean, that's sucking my memory now for over 50 years. And, and I mean it was a signal, if you will, to me, that something had happened to, to Bobby, you know, he had become a, he was becoming a different person, if you will.

12:17:43:13 [Malena Stone]: And he really, from the beginning, I think my dad always showed us a really sincere, authentic faith where there wasn't just like a list that we were just, you know, checking boxes for, but it was really just this transformative, you know, we wanna be better people. We wanna, you know, be people who don't have hate in our heart for anybody who love everyone and help anybody we can, because that's just what's in us,

12:18:14:18 you know? And so it's, it's a great way to be brought up because those were, those were values that they didn't just talk about. You know, we really, we did see faith in action from both of our parents. And I don't, there was never a time growing up where someone asked them for help that they didn't help, you know, from the beginning. They always did the best they could. And I mean, at one point we were poor enough that, and you don't have to take up a charity donation now, I mean, they're fine, but

12:18:47:07 when, but I remember my dad having to walk to work because he didn't have a dollar to ride the bus.

12:18:56:18 [Malena Stone]: And we lived on Gaston Street at the time. See that was a long walk from Forsyth Park to the mall where he worked at the record bar, you know, and around that same time, seeing him pull out a dollar from his wallet and give it to somebody that needed it, you know, because he, he would give, still would give anything to anybody who asked because he felt like that was what was the right thing to do. You know? And, and so that was just an amazing way to grow up to see parents who

12:19:31:04 don't just talk about those kind of values, but who really show, you know, we have this much food, so we'll share whatever we have.

Malena Stone

- 12:19:41:04 [Tom Kohler]: You go into college, you get the, your degree gives you a chance to focus on children. Do you take a straight job and then fall into the nonprofit sector? Or what, let's, let's kind of go with your journey college forward if we could.
- 12:19:59:12 [Malena Stone]: Well, I was very focused in college and you know, I think my parents would tell us if you, you know, if you work at the 7-11 down the street, we're proud of you no matter what. There was not like a, an expectation, but at the same time they would openly say, if you don't wanna struggle financially like we do, you might wanna stay in school and get a better job, or you're gonna be doing the same thing we're doing.
- 12:20:30:15 Which I think resonated with all of us. And all of my siblings went to college and most of us graduate school and had really successful careers because we knew that education was the way to, you know, a a more financially stable future than what my parents had growing up. And so I was very focused. I didn't date, I didn't, you know, I said I'm gonna get an education first and I'm gonna be able to support myself and never have to
- 12:21:03:06 get married unless I decide to, you know, and just kind of held true to that.
- 12:21:09:12 [Malena Stone]: And came back to Savannah after graduate school and got a job at Memorial Hospital working in pediatric rehab. So I did speech pathology for nine years there and saw children for everything from speech, speech problems to a lisp to feeding problems. And then started doing a lot of inpatient care with trauma victims, little children who'd
- 12:21:41:02 have accidents, coma therapy, things like that. Cochlear implant therapy and, and loved every minute of it. I just had a really wonderful career there. And then retired a little early. I met my husband at the hospital. He was a pediatric resident there. And he, he, from the beginning, you
- 12:22:11:14 know, I said, well, I, I wouldn't marry him. We didn't, I wouldn't marry him until he finished his residency. And I knew he was staying here because I would, didn't wanna leave my sisters 'cause we were all so close. So he, he proved himself, he, he, he got a job and stayed in Savannah. So I agreed to marry him because he is an amazing man and love him. We both love children and just instantly had this amazing chemistry from day one, got
- 12:22:44:23 married four years later and we had have three little boys, little stair step boys. And at some point in time I think we were just about to have our first child when

Malena Stone

he decided to go out on his own and start his own practice. And so that led to a early retirement for me because it turned

12:23:11:16 out that hiring an office staff was gonna be more than I was making at the hospital. So I became kind of the office staff so that I could bring my first little boy with me and, which was amazing. We opened Coastal Pediatrics when my oldest son was six weeks old and he just, just kind of like my mom did before me, we just made it work.

12:23:39:08 [Malena Stone]: We figured out how to do everything with a baby in a sling and just kind of kept moving and as, and then we went on to have two other little boys after Davis. And I think really what started kind of changing and my heart, my husband, after we had our third little boy, he was about eight days old when my husband started having really terrible, he had his first really serious seizure. Yes. And, and no diagno, no kind of

12:24:13:22 medical issues, no problems. Just had this horrible seizure. And it kind of just made me start doing a lot of thinking about the future, about just legacy, about compassion for people and just kind of, I think just kind of brought back a lot of, I don't know, I think my focus for my young

12:24:41:07 adulthood was kind of just being financially successful, being, having the things that I thought I wanted in life. And I always had strong faith, you know, from a early age and, and really never strayed from that. But I think after he started having seizures and I started noticing things in my children that as a parent I felt like were really hard to see, especially growing up so humbly to see my children not

12:25:14:02 really understand any type of need in the world. You know, my oldest was seven, my other two boys were two and four. And we would talk about, you know, there would be one day there were people waiting at a bus stop and my oldest said, what, what are those people doing? And I told him they were waiting on a bus and he said, well why won't they, why don't they just take their car? And I said, well baby, they probably don't have a car. They're

12:25:43:04 waiting, you know, and he's kind of jokingly said, well, everybody's got a car. And my husband said, everybody he knows has a car.

12:25:52:02 [Malena Stone]: And that was just kinda like a dagger to me as a parent. I was like, okay, he doesn't know anybody that doesn't own a car, you know? And we started thinking about these little boys who were going to private school and living in a gated neighborhood and just really didn't have a clue about the outside world, you know? And my husband and I both felt really strongly that, especially

Malena Stone

of parents as parents of faith, that it was our responsibility to, you know, not just raise children who are

12:26:25:19 successful in life, but raise children who wanna make a difference and care about people in the world and serve other people. We were both raised that way. So to see them just kind of have this entitled attitude, even as really young children, I kept thinking, this is not gonna change by itself, so what can we do to make this better? And, and it kind of started with we were just gonna find somewhere and

12:26:52:11 volunteer with them. And at the time, you know, we were taking the boys to church, we were taking 'em to the nursing homes at Christmas, that kind of thing. But it just wasn't enough. And you know, looking back at all that I knew about child development at those ages, children only know what's in front of them. They only know what they see. And so if they don't ever see a child who doesn't have food, then they don't understand childhood hunger. And if they don't see people that don't have shoes on their feet, they're

12:27:23:02 not gonna understand that there are people that don't have clothing and are in need in the world. And so we really started just kind of looking for somewhere that would be a good fit. And we figured out really fast that nobody in Savannah really wanted children running around their warehouse.

12:27:41:15 [Malena Stone]: So we actually could not find one nonprofit that would let us come and volunteer with your children, with my children. So, got it. And so, and we thought, you know, at this point talking about it is not enough. So we've got to have an action. We've got to have a step where we're taking them out and showing them that there are needs kind of in a safe way. And, you know, I wasn't really ready to take 'em under the bridge at to, to feed homeless people, but I wanted there to be some kind of

12:28:12:00 awareness on their part. And you know, at the same time, I have a brother-in-Law, also a really strong man of faith who would talk about his journey into teaching. So he started out as a first or second grade teacher, and he was a middle class child, went to BC private school. And when he started teaching, it was very shocking to him how many children in his classroom struggled with hunger, you know, and they would see

12:28:45:02 children come to school on Monday who couldn't hold their head up because they didn't have enough energy. They maybe eat school lunch and breakfast during the week, but when the weekend rolls around, they don't have enough food to eat at home. And so there was kind of an epidemic of children who would go to the nurse on Mondays because they had headaches and stomach aches and just hadn't had enough food to eat. And that really struck a

Malena Stone

- 12:29:12:11 chord with me because even though we were poor growing up, we had a meal. You know, we just, we were the family that didn't have leftovers, you know, but we, they were gone. We never had a pantry because we didn't have extra food, but we always had a meal.
- 12:29:27:19 [Malena Stone]: And so many of the children in our public school system don't have that. And so we would hear teacher after teacher just talk about this. So we started packing food bags at our house, just in our kitchen. And the boys and I would just go to Sam's and buy food and we would pack up these little bags and they would make little cards and put'em in the bags. And our oldest was in school, but the two younger boys would go to the school with me. This was pre Covid. So things were a lot more
- 12:29:59:21 open. And they would allow us to just hand these out on Fridays to the children. And they would take the bags home from school on Friday, so they would have food for the weekend. And
- 12:30:10:16 [Tom Kohler]: This is roughly what year are we in now?
- 12:30:11:22 [Malena Stone]: So this was about 2012, 2011, 2012. And...
- 12:30:22:17 [Tom Kohler]: And you Boys are like seven and five and
- 12:30:25:13 [Malena Stone]: Two and four. Two and four and seven, yeah. Wow. And so the two and 4-year-old would come with me to the school and we would pull our little wagon with our bags in it and the children would be lined up to go to the bus. And eventually it got to where the school asked us to hand out other bags that were brought to the school by Backpack Buddies and some other organizations. But it was mostly, you know, five or 10 bags here. And we would look at some of these bags and they would just have
- 12:30:57:11 either food that children wouldn't really eat in 'em. Like there were bags with MRE rations, which I'm pretty sure is illegal since the children aren't military, but you know, a can of spam and a fork and just not enough food to sustain a child over the weekend, or some of the groups just didn't show up. And so we had this long line of children and we would get to the
- 12:31:27:13 end of our bags and there were still children in line.

Malena Stone

- 12:31:32:01 [Malena Stone]: And there really was a very strong sense that we were, I, it felt like a mission trip to a third world country, you know, where you see this long line of children with no socks on, dirty clothing, you know, no belt and just, just children that don't really look like they're being taken care of, and they're hugging you and high fiving you and so excited to see you at the school because you're giving them a bag of
- 12:32:05:04 food. Oh. And that was kind of just a dagger to my heart. I just, it was just overwhelming to me that we lived a mile away and we were throwing away leftovers and there were children right down the street who didn't have enough to eat, you know? So I, it kind of was this aha moment where, you know, during this time I was kind of working just a few hours, but not
- 12:32:35:05 really working much at my husband's office. And had kinda, their office had grown to a really big office and I thought, what am I doing that's so important that I can't help with this? You know? And so we just started, it just was a very natural process of just talking to our friends that had children about the same age. And I think when, when
- 12:33:03:15 you have young children, you know, other people who have young children, because people with older children don't wanna hang out with you at the soft play locations and the parks and, you know, so you're kind of all in this together. And I had a lot of friends at that time who had the same faith where we really felt compelled to raise children who loved and served other people. And this just felt like a really great thing to do with them
- 12:33:33:09 just to expose them to needs that were right there in front of them and give them a way that they could meet them, you know? And so our group just kind of kept growing until the line at the school was kind of wrapped around the building and it just, we were kind of a redneck tailgate for a while. We would, after church, everybody would sign up and say, you know, I'll bring 24 cans of corn or whatever, you know, and, and then we would
- 12:34:04:03 get these bags packed once a month and kind of have a little pack food packing party, and then the kids and I would take 'em to the school on Fridays and hand them out.
- 12:34:15:01 [Tom Kohler]: And all this is done. I mean, you don't have any non-profit status?
- 12:34:18:15 [Malena Stone]: No, this is, this was just, we were just doing it just informal. Okay. And then eventually my husband and I go to Compassion Christian East

Malena Stone

Campus, which is like a small little satellite campus. And during that time, the church was building a children's building and had bought a portable classroom that was kind of like a trailer with kind of like a wide trailer. And when the children's building was built, they didn't have a use for the building. So we, we were, we were borrowing the

12:34:52:15 gym, which turned into the children's building, which became, they allowed us just to meet there and have people come from all over town and help pack up bags. And so we kind of just did this Facebook invite, like we weren't a nonprofit, we were just a group. And we said, anybody that wants their family to come and help pack bags just come and help us. So it just was a very organic start. People, it, it just kind of blew up

12:35:21:15 really fast from a really small, you know, kitchen table project to, you know, 50 or a hundred people showing up to help pack bags. And we were approached, so our pastor just said, well, you know, this building is hooked up to power and water and sewage and all of this, and y'all are welcome just to have it. You can stay here as long as you want to and bring

12:35:50:01 anybody you want to, to help you pack bags. So it was 900 square feet. We loved it because we could let our tables stay set up and, you know, it allowed us to pack a lot more bags and help a lot more food, a lot more children. And then we, we transitioned to being a nonprofit because we just wanted to help more kids and wanted to be able to apply for grants and things like that so we could do more with our money and be able to go to

12:36:20:21 the food bank and get food at a discount and these kind of things.

12:36:24:22 [Malena Stone]: And we really never went to people and said, Hey, do you wanna be a part of us? We just kept having people wanna come join, which was great. We had a lot of businesses, Publix, the Gap, just call and say, Hey, we heard y'all are packing bags, would you mind if we come and pack bags with you? And so then people started asking to come on field trips and we were 900 square feet with no bathroom. I mean, we had one

12:36:56:23 bathroom and no air conditioning and no windows. So we were there for four years and people kept coming despite the lack of comfort. We were amazed. It was the middle of summer and people came in and sweated it out with us. And

12:37:16:14 [Tom Kohler]: Why do you think that is?

Malena Stone

- 12:37:19:10 [Malena Stone]: I think, I think really people, especially people with children and people with families, really wanted the same thing that we wanted. They wanted their children to have an active faith where they could reach out and, and help people and, and know that they weren't helping an organization, they were helping children. And so from day one, we just said, you know, we're not gonna pay ourselves. We're gonna make this a volunteer organization. And 11 years later we've stayed with that
- 12:37:52:16 same model. We
- 12:37:55:02 [Tom Kohler]: No staff salary,
- 12:37:55:22 [Malena Stone]: No staff. So 11 years later, we have an 11,000, 11,000 square foot warehouse right down the street from here. And we had 18,000 volunteers last year, which is incredible. And the same thing, really. People just, I think when you can break it down to a really simple idea of what do we need to do to help these kids? And you say, well, here's
- 12:38:26:00 something we practically can do, and you allow people to come in and help. I think most people are naturally good and want to do good in the world. So, you know, our philosophy, they say, well, you know, do we have to go to your church to pack bags? Do we have to, you know, and we don't really care who a person is. If they wanna help, they're welcome. You know, so our, our volunteer population, I feel like is a very diverse group of people from
- 12:38:58:19 all walks of life.
- 12:38:59:22 [Malena Stone]: You'll have bank presidents packing next to somebody that came from Safe Shelter to help for the day, who's a domestic violence victim, you know, and we have group homes that bring adults with special needs to pack bags. It's a very simple process. So pretty much anybody can participate in it. And we just, we've, we've learned over the past 11 years how to, how to just break it down to the simplest little
- 12:39:31:14 building blocks and just invited people in to help. So we have sit down jobs and stand up jobs and thinking jobs and kind of robotic jobs where you just mutter through and get it done, you know? So
- 12:39:49:05 [Tom Kohler]: Do you think about the jobs in that way there? Sit down jobs or standup jobs?

Malena Stone

- 12:39:54:07 [Malena Stone]: Well, I, I've always loved organization. Like, I love being able to look at something and try to think of an easier way to do it. And try to think of...
- 12:40:02:21 [Tom Kohler]: Do you have any idea where that came from?
- 12:40:04:04 [Malena Stone]: My mother. Yeah, definitely. A hundred percent. A hundred percent. You know, and so, you know, for example, we have, because if you think about who's available to volunteer in the middle of the daytime during the work week, you get a lot of older adults who, a lot of our volunteers have had a teaching profession or nursing profession, and they still wanna help people. And they have plenty of time and years left to help. And so when they come in, to be able to have everything where
- 12:40:43:19 anybody can participate is a really big deal. So all of our, all of our trash cans are on wheels, so nobody has to pick 'em up. You know, all of our food bags go into carts that can be pushed. So there are heavier lifting jobs if people want them, but they aren't required to do 'em. I
- 12:41:04:11 see. Okay. And, you know, that's been, I think a big part of it is being accommodating and flexible with people, you know, and, and, and we love being able to just kind of figure out how to allow somebody to help.
- 12:41:22:18 [Tom Kohler]: So for you, that's, I mean, that's a good thought exercise. If somebody shows up and it's not obvious how they can help, instead of saying, we don't think we know how to involve you.
- 12:41:36:07 [Malena Stone]: Right.
- 12:41:36:18 [Tom Kohler]: That's, that's the learning moment for
- 12:41:38:15 [Malena Stone]: You, right? Is that right? That's right. Okay. And we, and really from the beginning we've had kind of a twofold mission, and the first part of it being to take care of the physical needs of children that are in crisis. So food, clothing, toiletries, just basic needs that people have. And the other part of the

Malena Stone

mission is to empower and inspire people to serve and, and, and to do it in child and family friendly

12:42:09:09 ways, because that was, you know, from the beginning, what we were looking for. So in our building, we have our pack, our big packing room has six tables, and the smallest table is a foot shorter than all the others. So that we can have preschoolers come on field trips, and they can independently pack bags of food. And...

12:42:32:23 [Tom Kohler]: Who thought of that? I mean, who actually got that to happen?

12:42:38:03 [Malena Stone]: Well, it was my idea, but I'm not mechanical like my mom is. So I'm smart enough to ask for help. So when I have somebody say, you know, I'm handy, what can I do? I say, well, how can we build a table that's just like these, but shorter, you know? And, and how can we, you know, be practical, but have things last a really long time, you know? So we ended up buying work bench tops to these really long, very durable

12:43:12:08 tables and just had volunteers build, you know, two by four bottoms and just painted them nicely and made 'em all match and called it a day. So

12:43:23:17 [Tom Kohler]: If I could, one of the things that interests me about what you're now describing is your remarkable attention to detail. And when you said, so every, you know, we did this so everybody looked the same and all that. In my experience, generally, many times, organizations that are there to kind of be responsive to people who are economically poor don't seem to mind to respond to them in kind of poorly looking ways. But

12:43:56:02 that's not when I, I mean, when people walk into, into your 11,000 foot warehouse, I mean, first, how many people can be in that warehouse as volunteers in a, in a day? I mean, what, what's the traffic flow?

12:44:10:10 [Malena Stone]: Well, so Thursdays are our biggest,

12:44:12:16 [Mickey Youmans]: Do me a favor, please start out say where that, where that where you are. Okay. There on Thursdays, you know, so we know.

Malena Stone

- 12:44:20:07 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah. Pack on. Yeah.
- 12:44:21:15 [Malena Stone]: Okay. So at PACK on Thursdays in our warehouse, we have really big groups of people. Sometimes 150, 200 people will come in and pretty much just find different jobs to do. We preset up jobs in different areas, and then people come in and we do the same thing over and over again. And so the process is pretty easy for people to learn. But what was, I think the most important to us from the very beginning is that this
- 12:44:55:04 was always the best we had. And so I think what a lot of people that are poor and have to request help, what they're used to is getting people's leftovers. And there's kind of just this mentality that, you know, once we're finished with something, we just give it to the poor and they'll love it. And, you know, people that are poor don't really want people spotted
- 12:45:26:21 up, wadded up, used clothing either, you know, and so, you know, if that's all you have, sure you wear it, but it, it's different when you're given the best that you have.
- 12:45:39:11 [Malena Stone]: And what that means, you know, as a parent is we make trades for things. You know, I know you want all four of those Nike shirts, but you know what, we could buy you two of those and then we can buy a couple for somebody else. So pick the two you want and then we're gonna buy the same thing that we just bought for you for somebody else. Because it's important to us that you learn from an early age that you should give people things that you want, you know, and give people things that are your best. And you know, there is some practicality about it.
- 12:46:12:07 Sure, we're gonna put it with the Target shorts and the name brand shirt to spread out the resources. But there definitely is that sense when people come into PACK that this is the best we have. And I think that compels people who want to leave a legacy and wanna leave their mark somewhere to say, if I can end a teaching career where I devoted my whole life to children, and I can come to this place and feel like I can do even more
- 12:46:44:03 good with the best that I have, then they want to come there and they want to be involved. My best volunteer right now, my right hand lady came to me about four years ago. We went to church together, but we were acquaintances. She's probably 10 years older than I am, and maybe a little older than that. Don't tell her I said that, I don't really know. But anyway, she was a teacher from
- 12:47:14:00 the Atlanta school system, taught in really poor downtown schools in Atlanta and came here to teach at Haven Elementary School. Retired here, lives at the

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Landings with her family, and she taught at Haven for several years. And then when she came to the age where she can retire, she decided that she would retire to help me full-time for free.

- 12:47:40:05 [Malena Stone]: And her reasoning was, she said, you know, I have seen firsthand all the needs that these children have, and I feel like I can do so much good here, and this is what I want to do, you know? And so my employees are just these amazing people who have just kind of devoted their life to helping. And so I think that kind of inspires all of us. And we do have, I think we, we do bring in volunteers that are more affluent
- 12:48:14:21 volunteers because they're comfortable there. And the reason is because it's clean, it smells good, it's organized, and it's, it's the best that we have because we want to feel proud of it because that's where our legacy is, that's where our investment of time and resources and everything else is. So we constantly brainstorm about how we can make it better, how we can
- 12:48:42:05 make it a better, not just volunteer experience, but, you know, our ultimate goal is for the kids that come in to feel the warmth and the love that goes into what we do for them. So we do field trips at our building, and so children come from private schools, just like my boys did, to learn about children in need. And when you can tell a second grader that a mile from their school, there are
- 12:49:10:20 hundreds of children that don't have food on the weekends, it exposes them to something they don't know about most of the time. And at that age, children are naturally compassionate. And so it's different than talking to adults because nine times outta 10, one of the kids will raise their hand and say, I have food at my house, and I'll bring it. You know, they're very, there's an action step immediately. This is something, you know, I had a first grader from a little private school listen to, you know, this
- 12:49:44:01 compelling argument for children his same age who didn't have food. And he raised his hand and said, you know, we have 18 kids in our class.
- 12:49:52:23 [Malena Stone]: If we all brought an extra snack for a month, we could feed a class somewhere else. Snacks that didn't have snacks in their classroom. And, you know, that's what we're looking for, is to just get these little minds working on, you know, not just how can I educate myself and make money and, you know, have a successful life, but how can I think about other people? How can I give to other people? And, and how can that just be like a natural part of life for kids? And the other group of field

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- 12:50:26:01 trips that we get are children who come from schools that we take bags to, and the children come and they're able to be most of them for the first time, a part of helping people instead of just being the recipients of charity. And I think that changes who they are, you know? And, and it's always their favorite field trip because they, they feel it naturally. It feels good to help people. They get to do something, they get
- 12:50:54:21 to do something they get to. And when they walk through our building, you know, other, other than the food, we have two other programs. One of them is a duffle bag program for children in need. And the children who get our duffle bags, our children, many of them are homeless. And in Savannah we have several hundred children who are homeless. And by homeless, the definition is they don't have a permanent address. And where schools come
- 12:51:25:23 in, the concern for them is these children a lot of times don't have just basic things that they need to come to return to school. And so their goal is to get 'em back to school. And our goal is to give them the basics so they can go back to school.
- 12:51:42:08 [Malena Stone]: Usually the duffle bags will have about a week's worth of clothes in 'em. They have socks, underwear, pajamas, toiletries, and everything's new. And the reason that everything's new is, like we talked about before, we wanna give the kids a fresh start. And we wanna say, you know, as a community, we are not just checking a box that we gave you what you needed to return to school. We want you to have a better life. You know, we wanna give the best we have so that you can feel the love and
- 12:52:14:13 encouragement that we have for you, because we want you to have a better life. You know? And so everything that we can do to make those bags just really special. We put little tags and put the child's name on the bag. And for many of the kids, that's all they have are the items in their bag, you know, so a lot of the children we serve everything from human trafficking victims, children going into foster care. We serve all the shelters, all
- 12:52:46:03 the hospitals in town, the fire department, the police department, the courts, and all the schools here.
- 12:52:53:08 [Tom Kohler]: Let me stop you there, just so I get my head around this a little bit. So do you have like, well first, how many children do you feel like, we've talked about 18,000 volunteers go to the other side of the equation. How many children do you think like you interact with in a given day, week, month, and year?

Malena Stone

- 12:53:11:18 [Malena Stone]: In 2023, PACK put together and delivered over 200,000 care bags that went out into the community to children. So each week we provide about 4,600 bags of food that go home with kids on Fridays. And every month we provide between 125 to 150 of these duffle bags that have clothing, toiletries, toys, just whatever a child that age would need
- 12:53:46:15 or want. And then part of that duffle bag system also is we have a cottage behind our building that is a little handy home. And during Covid we got some help from Habitat. They weren't building houses. And so some of the volunteers came and refaced the front of this little handy home, and we added a keypad so that when children need things in the middle of the
- 12:54:15:18 night, the emergency providers can come back there, put in a code, and they can get a bag for a child. Because the truth of the matter is that when they find a child in human trafficking or a child goes into foster care, a lot of times it's two in the morning or it's a Saturday night and there isn't anywhere open that can help them. So this just allows us to be open 24 hours a day. So I think
- 12:54:43:05 that part of our program will be the part that grows into other counties eventually, because there are a lot of places surrounding Savannah where they need resources. And this allows us to do it. It's really a very low to no cost way to be able to serve children. So we don't allow individuals to come, but the service providers have to come do an orientation, and then we give 'em a code and we have a camera in there, and we've, we've never had
- 12:55:12:15 any trouble. So, and we're working on opening our second little cottage. And these little cottages were actually where we originally stored our food. So before we had our building, when we had the little trailer that we were packing in, we bought these little handy homes and we'd store the packed food in it to hand out at the schools.
- 12:55:35:21 [Tom Kohler]: Well, this sort of goes, I mean, now you're talking, I'm, I mean, you've got 11,000 square feet of warehouse.
- 12:55:42:14 [Malena Stone]: Yes, yes.
- 12:55:43:08 [Tom Kohler]: You've got hand zones. Yes. Do you have like 15 trucks? I mean, no, what, what, what's, what, what's, and I'm also curious...

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- 12:55:49:20 [Malena Stone]: We have figured out the lowest cost way to do pretty much everything. So, and, and you know, that part of it is very important to us too, because that way, so we have a few churches and, and foundation grants that help us pay for our overhead, which our overhead is basically the light bill, the cable bill, and the mortgage on our building. So, and now our building is a nonprofit space, so we don't pay property tax, which is really nice. But everything else, if, if an individual or
- 12:56:25:00 anybody else donates to PACK, a hundred percent of it just goes to buy food and clothing and toiletries, which is great. And you can say that again and kind of unheard of. Yes.
- 12:56:34:14 [Tom Kohler]: And you can say that to your donors.
- 12:56:36:02 [Malena Stone]: Yes, yes. Which is amazing. In good conscious. In good conscious. And so we have a truck, we have a Ford Transit van that is a big giant van that was donated by JC Lewis Ford. And it's kind of like a free lease deal for us. So we pay the insurance and the van pretty much runs every day, all day and has a ramp in the back. So the food bags go
- 12:57:06:16 into these big carts and are pushed onto the van from our loading dock and go out to the schools. And then we have about 20 community volunteers who each take an hour and they come the same hour every week, and they go to a school, pick up the empty carts and leave the full ones. So they go the same route every week. So that's how we get all the bags to the schools. And then on Fridays they go home with the kids.
- 12:57:35:03 [Tom Kohler]: So, okay. Let me, how, who keeps all this organized and who is your, how do you do information management?
- 12:57:46:04 [Malena Stone]: It is always a battle. It's always a battle because we pretty much rely on volunteers for all of our different needs. And it's kind of like, you don't even know what you need until you grow and then have a problem and have to figure out how to solve it. So we're always kind of in flux where we're figuring out how to pivot a little bit and change the way we're doing things to make 'em easier and better. So
- 12:58:18:13 probably our, our weakest area right now is administrative because it's me and I run out of hours. So a lot of us, I mean, right now I probably work about 50 hours a week and, and pretty much I'm home when my kids are home and the other

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hours are really early morning and really late at night and just do whatever has to be done. And my philosophy is whatever needs doing,

12:58:52:13 it's what I'm gonna do. So, but I try to replace myself where I can and yield to people that are smarter at different areas than I am and give them some room to just own, take ownership of an area that they will do a lot better job of than I will

12:59:15:01 [Tom Kohler]: Do you have critics?

12:59:17:18 [Malena Stone]: Yes. We, so when you have 18,000 volunteers, people are really quick to tell you what, you're not doing the right way. And overall, I would say our biggest criticism is not really a problem, but people want more times to volunteer more. A lot of times people wanna volunteer when they wanna volunteer, which may not be when we're open. I

12:59:47:20 mean, we've had people ask to come in at nine o'clock at night and, you know, can, can we bring our family tonight at nine? And we're like, well, we're not gonna be there. But we, we do have a very, we're flexible in that we recognize because we rely on volunteers that we do have to let some of them have a little bit of independence with doing their, what they're, what they're tasked to do. So we have different churches, different businesses

13:00:19:17 that come in during the week and lead their own packing events at our facility.

13:00:24:01 [Malena Stone]: And so we've just basically taught them how to restock our tables. And we do it the same way every time. We have pictures and little, you know, charts on how to restock it, and we provide all the materials for them to restock the table and pack it and go. And so when we're not there, there's still food being packed. So through that process and you know, we, we have the capacity to do about twice as much as we're doing now with the same facility, given the number of volunteers we have.

13:00:58:14 So the, pretty much the biggest sticking point is just the resources to buy more and more food as the costs go up.

13:01:06:16 [Tom Kohler]: Right. You've talked about PACK, your organization has, has grown organically. Do you have a, now that you're, you know, 12, 12 years in, I mean the size, growth, et cetera, I mean, do you have a more formal way of thinking about what you want to be doing in five years or 10 years? Or is it still more like, we're going to take it day by day and

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- 13:01:32:18 [Malena Stone]: We definitely have goals. I think when we started, we just really wanted to help kids. And so we were very open to like, what is our path? What is our goal here? And then probably about five years ago, we kind of centered in on we're not gonna be able to do all of this. So we're gonna have, if we wanna do a good job with what we're doing, we're gonna say, this is what we're gonna do and we're gonna do it really well. And then, you know, we're open to the possibility that down the road
- 13:02:03:01 that vision could expand. But it's, you know, the, the part where you get to really give people a purpose, you know? And we have so many volunteers that come to us really just looking for purpose in life. And when they come in and find something that they just feel really good about doing, it just makes them wanna do more and be there more and invest more.
- 13:02:28:08 [Malena Stone]: And, and they talk about it. So they bring their friends and their friends, you know? And so that part of it is, I think one of the biggest things I didn't foresee from the beginning was just that part where you just get to help people find a place, which is amazing. We just, we love it. And you know, people, not everybody has the same philosophy for hap for helping. You know, we have people who will come in and say, well, you know, if you feed poor kids, you're just replicating the
- 13:03:00:19 cycle and they're just gonna grow up to be people, you know? And we just kind of feel like they're hungry kids and we're gonna feed 'em. And we do think there are other jobs along the way, but they're not ours. So we're not, we're not taking ownership of those. But our, besides the duffle bags and the food, we also have a beautiful boutique in the back of our building. And it's always everybody's favorite part because it, it would, I think it would stand up to a boutique on
- 13:03:33:22 Broughton Street in downtown Savannah. And when our children who come there on a field trip, walk through that building, every single one of them says, I wanna shop in here. And that gives us a chance to teach them what I was able to teach my children, which is, you know, well, when we give to people and it's something that we would want and we're proud of it, it feels really good. And I think when they can walk through that idea at seven or
- 13:04:02:02 eight years old, then it changes how they give as adults, you know, and the way that they see life. And then, you know, all of that is there.
- 13:04:12:16 [Malena Stone]: And so much love and time is put into it that when the foster kids come in, immediately they feel loved. And, and you know, we, we haven't had

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one who has come in and not just, I feel like just melted. You know, their, their barriers just kind of melt because there's this thought that children get, I, especially as teenagers, why are you helping me? Why are you doing this? And I, I think when they realize our

13:04:46:11 only motive is to just to love them and to really just serve them and make their life better, I think they feel that, you know, and, and the amazing part to me is that when kids come in, I always thought, well, you know, will we talk about faith? Will we talk about our faith with the kids? Will we, you know, 'cause we're writing our own rules here. What do we, and

13:05:15:13 honestly, most of the children that come in know that we are Christians. They will say, well, you love God, don't you? Or you, you know, and it's, it's funny because it's kind of an intangible thing that I think adults don't feel, but children do. And we don't ever have to say much. And just

13:05:39:14 the faith is tangible to them because of the love that they see, you know?

13:05:45:07 [Tom Kohler]: So it is faith in action.

13:05:46:15 [Malena Stone]: It definitely is faith in action.

13:05:49:09 [Tom Kohler]: They see that. And so they get the whole deal. Yes. With faith in action.

13:05:54:07 [Malena Stone]: They really do. Yeah.

13:05:55:14 [Tom Kohler]: That's interesting. I'm trying to think of more questions to ask you, and I may not be able to. So what I'm saying to you now is if there are parts of your story that I've not been able to give you a way to bring forward, feel free. Okay.

13:06:19:12 [Malena Stone]: Well, I would say that one really interesting part of this journey with starting a nonprofit, people will ask, well, you know, would you have done it over again? Would you have done it the same way? And first of all, I don't, I do

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think that a journey into helping is similar to a faith journey in that now there's no way if you said, okay, I

13:06:56:21 want you to feed 4,600 children every week and run this warehouse and climb these ladders and bring all this stuff here and do all this stuff, I never would sign up for that, and I don't think anybody else would. So you start with a really simple yes. And what can I do from where I am? And it's just those small steps that I think just kind of take you on a path of faith and

13:07:20:05 of helping and growing, both as a person and just as a leader, where you learn this worked really well and this didn't. So you know, it, when you lead a big organization, you definitely feel the microscope of, you can, you can see your flaws and what you need to fix about yourself or just, just things that you could do differently to, because you see the reaction it has from people and what, you know, what it

13:07:51:20 produces. And really one really incredible thing that I've learned, I've had the opportunity to talk to a lot of missionaries and people who are in serving fields, but what I consider to be, you know, they're not, they're not going home to an air conditioned house. You know, they're living in the jungle somewhere and doing this. So even though we serve, I really don't

13:08:20:21 consider us to be in the same stratosphere as people that leave their whole life behind to go live in a foreign country to help people. But I've heard a lot of them talk about how people in our country really don't have the chance to see miraculous things happen because they don't really have to have big faith.

13:08:48:18 [Malena Stone]: You know, dinner shows up, this shows up and, you know, where they're, you know, sitting in a hut praying for dinner and a chicken runs by at that exact moment. And they know it's a miracle, you know? And so in the beginning stages I would hear these stories and, you know, just kind of file 'em away and think, well, you know, we're not really doing that here. But as time has progressed and the scope of what we do has grown so much, it got beyond where my husband and I were able to

13:09:22:13 write a check for the food we needed, you know? And when our food bills became, you know, \$67,000 a month for, you know, buying food and you're talking about an organization with no marketing, no grant writers, no, you know, you just kind of, and we really have seen just these really miraculous things happen. I mean, for one, there's never been a week where we weren't able to deliver

13:09:53:05 food to schools, you know, and help the kids. Not one school has gone without one bag of food in 11 years. We were open every day during Covid. We didn't get it. We were out in the community passing out food and housing projects to

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children who had covid and no mask. And we were somehow in a little protective bubble through all of that, which was amazing. I mean,

13:10:22:22 just amazing. But we've gotten to see some other really cool things happen. I'll tell you a, a really neat story. So we, when we started having really hard struggles with getting food, and a lot of it happened because the federal grants changed, a lot of the federal grants that were just aimed at serving poor people became covid relief grants. So they would go to food

13:10:49:14 banks as covid relief.

13:10:50:19 [Malena Stone]: Well, when Covid went away, the grants went away. They didn't, they didn't reform back into grants feeding children that needed food. They just vanished. And so a lot of the food banks, including the food bank here, they didn't have funds to replace that. So there was no backup plan. And so when you're an organization that needs, you know, 4,600 of each item and you have to pay retail or collect it or find it or get it with no equipment, it's a big under. It's a really big logistics

13:11:24:03 undertaking. And we've learned how to do everything from buying, I call it black market food, but it's not, it's we'll use, go to pallet liquidators and buy things that are pallets of, we bought six pallets of juice that were 45 days from their expiration, but we can use that much juice in two weeks. So we're, we're good, but we saved \$7,000 off of what we would pay,

13:11:49:22 you know, at a food bank for that juice. So we, you know, we're learning how to use our money wisely and resource things, but we had some amazing just compassion and outpouring of generosity from Crider Foods in South Georgia. Started donating two pallets of canned chicken every month, which is about, you know, close to a hundred thousand dollars worth of food a year. So when that donation happened, we started thinking, how can we get other companies just to give us one pallet

13:12:22:22 of food? And, but if we do that, we've gotta have somewhere to put the food. And it sounds like an 11,000 square foot warehouse is huge, but we're completely outta space, so we don't have anywhere to store food. So one day we're standing at our back door and we look out and there's a warehouse probably a hundred yards away, that's just this small warehouse. And Susan, who's my volunteer, who quit teaching to come help me full-time for free,

13:12:53:02 we're standing there and she said, where'd that warehouse come from?

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- 13:12:57:17 [Malena Stone]: And I said, I dunno, we'd never noticed it before. 'cause we're in there working, you know, we're not really like standing outside looking around us. So I said, well, you know what, I'm gonna get online and figure out who owns that warehouse and call and see if they're interested in selling it. So I get online, figure out who owns it, call 'em. And I really, in my heart, felt like they were gonna say, if y'all need this warehouse, you can have the warehouse. 'cause, because I don't know why that, I just felt like, why would that not work out? You
- 13:13:31:05 know? So I call and they say, no, we're not interested in selling it. We, you know, our family owns a lot of property. We renovate 'em and do long-term leases, and that's how our family makes our income. We own a lot of properties, you know? No thank you. So I just kind of said, well, you know, if you ever decide to sell it, let us know. And so Susan and I started walking around this
- 13:13:59:21 warehouse on Fridays praying that nobody would lease it, which is kind of a mean prayer, right? So it's, you know, a hundred yards from our building. And, and, and really with this whole, it was kind of just like this whole intentional prayer of God. We know that if we're gonna feed more kids and continue to grow this effort, and to make it sustainable, we're gonna have to start getting more donations outside of the food bank from other places
- 13:14:30:05 because we don't have enough food. So we don't know if this is our warehouse or not, but somewhere close by, because we don't wanna add employees or the cost of employees. We really need more space.
- 13:14:44:09 [Malena Stone]: So in October, nothing had really happened, and I called the man who owned the warehouse and said, would you come talk to me about leasing the warehouse? I didn't really wanna lease because it was just kind of dumping money down a hole. And as a nonprofit, it's really hard to get a grant for a lease, but we knew we needed the space to be able to ask the, you know, companies to donate stuff. So he comes and talks to
- 13:15:14:13 me about the lease, and as he's leaving, he says, well, we haven't really been able to lease the space. I did not fess up that we'd been praying against him leasing the space, but we haven't been able to lease it, so we might be interested in selling it. So before I could think of anything else to say, I just kind of said, well, we don't have any money to buy it, but we would love to lease it for a year. If you would be willing to give us a purchase price up front, we
- 13:15:44:17 could try to fundraise to buy this building. So he talked to his family, they agreed, they gave us a really good deal with them kind of riding off part of the price since we were a nonprofit. And the next day I came into my warehouse and one of my volunteers said, you know, I heard you talking to the guy yesterday, and I feel really compelled to pay for half that

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- 13:16:11:23 property and I wanna pay for half of it.
- 13:16:16:16 [Malena Stone]: And this is a volunteer who drives a Subaru. She's not, you know, rolling in money, but just a really dedicated volunteer. And so I said, well, you know, could we do something to commemorate your husband who passed away? She hadn't has no children. She said, you know, I'm 76 years old, I have no children. My husband has passed away, and I don't want anything to commemorate him. I just want you to be
- 13:16:50:10 able to answer that. God made a way, you know, which is really amazing in a world where most people want their name on buildings and things. But really that was her only intention through the process, was just to, you know, do the right thing and leave a legacy of loving people and caring about people. You know? And so that's the kind of volunteers I'm surrounded by,
- 13:17:18:11 which is an incredible thing, you know, not just for them, but for me. Because when, you know, when we're thinking, oh, I don't wanna move any more corn today or whatever, it's for the day, you know, you're thinking, well, all of these people are kind of inspiring you at the same time to keep going because they're willing to sacrifice whatever they have to help also, you know? Well,
- 13:17:43:05 [Tom Kohler]: It, it, it seems like what you've been able to do is, I mean, this notion of sort of creating a better world, right? So, but also what's happened is you have created a, a world of good around you. And how many people get to live inside a world of good, not many.
- 13:18:05:23 [Malena Stone]: It is an incredible thing to be surrounded by so many people who just really care about people and love people. And you know, we've really seen an experience where people around us of all different walks of faith, all different backgrounds are able to come together and are kind of just bonded in what they agree on, which is helping and wanting people to, especially children, to have a better life. And it's, it's exciting also because we get to see all these really cool
- 13:18:40:19 things happen. Like, like the warehouse building and the, the other half of that is, so six months later, we're 5% away from our goal of buying this building. And the same volunteer has already said, if, you know, if you can't fundraise that 5%, I'll pay for that too. And we're like, no, we we're gonna do this here. You've done enough. But we will also own the car
- 13:19:07:09 wash, which is in front of us. And miraculously this old junky looking car wash, although it's probably 70 or 80 years old, doesn't have one crack in it. It's a, it's a,

Malena Stone

you know, brick car wash, and we are gonna turn it into storage units. So we'll be able to store food and school supplies and really allow even more compartmentalized kind of helping for groups to be

13:19:36:02 able to step in and manage one of our units and, and help. So we're, we're excited about the whole journey.

13:19:46:12 [Tom Kohler]: So people from all walks of life who come from all different faith homes have found a home for themselves with some purpose.

13:19:55:18 [Malena Stone]: Yes. Yeah.

13:19:57:10 [Tom Kohler]: Yeah. I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed this. I know they have, and I know that the people that will be able to watch this videotape in perpetuity, because the city will archive it that way, will appreciate it. And just at a personal note, you're a genius. No, you're a genius. You are organizational genius. I mean, I've been around

13:20:30:05 nonprofits for 50 years. I know the traps. I I know the rabbit holes. You've avoided them. It's unbelievable to me.

13:20:40:10 [Malena Stone]: So sweet. Well, thank you.

13:20:41:13 [Tom Kohler]: It's true. You, you've just avoided so many of the rabbit holes anyway. Doesn't have on

13:20:46:17 [Malena Stone]: Tape. Well, we love, we love it. And it's, you know, it's amazing to be with people who love being there. You know, we just, yeah,

13:20:53:17 [Tom Kohler]: It's awesome.

13:20:54:10 [Malena Stone]: Get to do it. And

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- 13:20:55:10 [Tom Kohler]: Then just doesn't have to be on tape. I'm just curious, I mean, how, how do you manage, I mean, I'm assuming that you get invited to speak at lots of different conferences and that people want you to become, you know, the face of their, I mean, I I, I, it just seemed to me that the amount of opportunity you have to dilute your focus is extreme. How, how do you think about that?
- 13:21:20:23 [Malena Stone]: Well, oddly enough, we haven't, so we've stayed very clear of ever forming any kind of political alliance, because I always kind of just want to be an organization that's aligned with peace for all people, you know? And I just, so for that reason, I've kind of stayed away from the political realm, but really we're, believe it or not, outside of a lot of the public radar. So if people are grandparents or parents and they
- 13:21:52:20 have children, chances are they know about us because their kids have come on a field trip or that kind of thing. But really, I would say in the corporate world, I think we're not really on the radar, which I'm, I'm not really bothered by because it, it just kind of allows me to keep doing, you know, what I'm doing. And, and I, I love it. So I, and I do, we do have
- 13:22:21:15 some corporate Oh, sure. Affiliation and, and, you know, I, I enjoy the speaking part of it. I like interacting with people too, but I just love being there with the kids when they come in and, you know, getting to do that part of it. So
- 13:22:39:03 [Tom Kohler]: Would you consider doing a TED Talk or something like that?
- 13:22:43:03 [Malena Stone]: I, I, I would probably one day.
- 13:22:46:18 [Tom Kohler]: Again, you've, again, just to my eye. So the story is so instructive and it's worked, right? I mean, but the story is so instructive and there's some, in my opinion, there's some universal insights in that story that people could glean, I think. Anyway.
- 13:23:09:12 [Malena Stone]: Well, well
- 13:23:10:05 [Tom Kohler]: Thank you again.
- 13:23:10:20 [Malena Stone]: Thank you. Thank you'all all for doing all of this. I appreciate it so much, so sweet to include me