

April 26, 2021

I had the immense pleasure today of sitting down to talk with Rose Farmer, a long-time church member who is also a custodian and childcare provider at Shady Grove UMC - Short Pump. I have known Rose since 1998, when my family started attending SGUMC. She cared for our older son in the nursery when we first came to church and remembered when our younger son was born and then baptized in the "new" sanctuary. I also had the privilege of serving on staff with Rose for 16 years.

Rose is 80 years old. She said that all her life she thought she was born in 1941. She recently found a box of mementos from her mother that had her original birth certificate. She was surprised to learn she was actually born in 1940!

Rose's parents were married at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church and lived on Floyd Avenue when Rose was born. Rose was anointed at St. Andrew's. She had two brothers, one of whom is still alive. Her mother worked for Miller & Rhoads and her father drove tractor trailers. When her dad moved out, her mother moved the children to Cherry Street and then to a two room apartment on Cumberland Street in Oregon Hill. Rose attended Binford Junior High School. She and her brothers would go to the William Byrd Community House for arts and crafts and after school activities. Rose played on the baseball team. She walked to Grove Avenue Baptist church for choir practice. She met her husband, Floyd Farmer, at a neighborhood playground and she left school in the ninth grade to marry him and start a family. She would have been married 65 years this year if Floyd were still alive.

Rose and Floyd moved to Hanover Avenue and had six children: Mary Lee, Sharon, Bernard, Denise, Michael, and Floyd, Jr..

Floyd Farmer's parents bought the house across the street from the church for \$2,000 in 1947. The house was known as the Mayflower House and served as a fellowship lodge for Shady Grove Church. Church members Lizzie and Jim Taylor handled the sale of the house to Floyd's parents. Rose and Floyd and their children moved in with Mr. and Mrs. Farmer and set up housekeeping in a large room upstairs. They added a bathroom. All the beds were lined up on one side of the room. Floyd's brother, Loney, and his wife, Ruby, lived downstairs with their three girls. Mr. and Mrs. Farmer also slept downstairs. At one point, 15 people were living in the home! Rose explained that Loney's given name was Elder, but the family started calling him Loney, short for baloney, because that's what he always asked for from the store!

Sometime after Michael was born in 1962, Binford Leake and Tom Henley (Ruth's husband) came to the Farmer home to ask if Rose and her sister-in-law Margaret (Farmer) Shaw would be willing to clean the church. Margaret, Floyd's sister, had been cleaning the chapel before Rose and Floyd moved to Pouncey Tract Road, but she stopped sometime after she married Bill Shaw. Margaret and Rose agreed to the cleaning job and agreed to be paid \$25 per month, which they split equally between them. Since Margaret had cleaned the church, she thought she

might be the one "in charge", but Rose ended up spending more time in the buildings and somehow became the leader of the two of them. Rose says this was always a bit of a sore spot for Margaret.

Rose said that she and Margaret worked hard cleaning the church. They were on their hands and knees scraping wax off the floors in the chapel building. The church did not have a vacuum cleaner when they started. Their job duties also included helping to keep up the grounds. Rose's husband also cared for the cemetery, but Rose and Margaret were the ones pushing the lawn mower. Rose said Margaret would sit beside each gravestone to use hand trimmers to cut the grass. Floyd was handy with tools and made a weed eater that they could all use outside. Rose said Margaret preferred to clean her "old school" way, which was the same way she kept her home, "neat as a pin." They cleaned every window in the chapel building. Rose said that the stained glass windows were not installed when they first started - the stained glass came later.

Rose and Margaret cleaned the church a couple of days each week. In addition, Rose worked an evening shift at Peoples Drug store in Westland Shopping Center for five years. She said Mrs. Farmer kept the children while she was at work.

Rose brought her children to SGUMC for Sunday school, youth group, and church. She remembered that her children were at church with the Sitterson children, the Nuckols (Peggy and Tommy) children, the Ayers children (Shirley Hall and her siblings), the Dudley children, the Leake children, the Henley children, and the Ford children, among others.

Rose remembers several women of the church providing dinner for youth on Sunday nights in the fellowship hall in the chapel building (now known as Chapel Hall). She said Mrs. Ayers, Mrs. Leake, Mrs. Mitchell, and Ruth Henley would take over the kitchen and no one else was allowed in the kitchen. Rose said she sent cornbread with her children for the meal on Sunday nights for several weeks in a row. When she missed a week, the women asked her what had happened. She said she made sure to send the cornbread every time after that!

In 1978, Rose and Floyd and Loney and Ruby each purchased and built homes on Pouncey Tract Road from Jim Walters Homes. Loney died before his house was finished, but Ruby and the girls moved into their house and Rose, Floyd, and their children moved in next door. Rose' youngest son, Floyd, Jr., still lives in the two story house across from the church.

Rose's husband, Floyd, had polio as a child. In 1982 he became ill and could no longer work. He suffered a heart attack and had severe arthritis. Mike Walters was the pastor at Shady Grove when Rose's husband was ill at St. Mary's Hospital. Rev. Walters took Floyd in a wheelchair down to the hospital chapel and Floyd joined the church shortly before his death in 1982. He is buried in the cemetery, along with many more of the Farmer family.

The church was expanding through these years. The classrooms on the north side of the chapel (closest to current sanctuary) were added first and then the wing was added on the south side (closest to Striker soccer complex).

In that part of chapel building there had been a baby nursery across from the men's restroom. The toddler nursery was across from the kitchen, and the four year old nursery was the next room down. The pastor's office was where the office for the Center for the Creative Arts office is currently located. A parlor was set up, with furniture donated by Ruth Henley, in the small room at the end of the hall as you exit to the parking lot. Rose's brother-in-law, William Johnson (married to Juanita Farmer, sister of Margaret and Floyd) built the cabinets in the Center's office as well as those in the kitchen. Rose said she and Margaret purchased the white cabinets in the kitchen and Ruth Hall's family installed them.

Rose laughed as she told me about the time that she and Margaret went into the furnace room in the chapel building and took down all the drywall in order to carve out more storage space. Her son Floyd put the sheet rock back up in the newly configured closet.

Rose said that during Rev. Burt Brooks' term at SGUMC, the church really began to grow. The church hired Leslie Rivenbark to start Shady Grove UMC preschool using several rooms in the chapel building. The Sunday school classes began overflowing and temporary buildings were brought in to the back corner of the parking lot. Plans were made for new buildings to meet the needs of the congregation. Rose continued to take care of babies on Sunday morning and to clean the expanding church.

The sanctuary, education building, and fellowship hall were built. Rose remembered that on the first Sunday of worship in the sanctuary, Rev. Brooks called her early in the morning to ask her to come help with a large swarm of bugs that had congregated inside the church by the double doors going out to Pouncey Tract Road. Rose said she arrived, took a look at the bugs, and said, "Well, those are just 'tato bugs" (potato bugs, also known as ladybugs). Rev. Brooks said he had never seen so many and didn't know what to do. Rose simply got out the vacuum cleaner and vacuumed them up before services began.

Rose also told stories about other animal encounters on campus. She said Margaret called her to come down the hall in the chapel building one day. Margaret had opened the door from chapel hall that goes out to the cemetery and found a large black snake hanging over the door. Margaret got rid of the snake! Another time, Rose was called by staff in the church office because a black snake was spotted in the office by the copy machine next to the fireplace. When she arrived, staff members had climbed on top of the desks to get away from the snake. Yet another black snake was found by Mr. Williams, whose cleaning service was hired to clean the fellowship hall and education building. Mr. Williams called Rose one evening to report that he had seen the snake and that he "doesn't do snakes." Rose told him she would take care of it. She sent her two sons to the fellowship hall early the next morning. They found the snake along the baseboard near the fellowship hall kitchen and were able to remove it.

Rose also recalled the time Denise walked out of the chapel building on a summer afternoon after cleaning up from Vacation Bible School. Denise yelled as she saw several skunks, one of which was snow white, heading for a door into the chapel. Rose came and shooed the skunks

away. She followed the skunks to the sanctuary and watched them go under the crawl space. Rose kept an eye out for the skunks all week and was able to use her phone to take some pictures. Her son, Bernard, came to pick her up one afternoon and saw Rose leaning over a fence to take a picture of the white skunk. He said, "Mama, if that skunk gets you, you aren't getting in my truck!" A professional exterminator was needed to relocate the skunk family.

Rose shared some fond memories from working with Jim Meyers. During Jim's time on staff, he was asked to lead senior ministry. He came to Rose and Margaret to ask if they would help him start a senior group. He would make a menu and the three of them would prepare and serve the food together to the group. Rose told Jim that it would be a lot easier to just double the recipe to make enough cake for everyone, but Jim insisted on making the cakes one at a time. Rose said she and Margaret were excited to find two beautiful crystal punch bowls on sale at Hecht's. They bought them to use for the senior group. At one of the gatherings, Rose was scooping sherbet into the punch bowl and was horrified when the bowl shattered into many little pieces! Rose loved going with the group on a bus to places such as Pennsylvania, Williamsburg, and Washington, D.C.. It was Margaret's birthday when the group went to a musical theater production in Williamsburg. The whole group loved when the lead singer crooned "Happy Birthday" to Margaret!

Rose recalled the craft bazaars that had been held at the church over the years. She said Lucille Smith made the best lemon cookies in the world. So many women could crochet, knit, and quilt. She remembered a picture of Mrs. Leake and Mrs. Ayers standing on Mrs. Ayers' front porch, holding up a large American flag that they had made by crochet or knit. She remembered Gillie Howard (Jean Howard's husband) had bought a large Christmas tree for the chapel that was then used in the sanctuary and decorated with Christmas ornaments made by the ladies in the church. Mr. Howard's family brought him in his wheelchair to see the tree in the sanctuary. Rose also fondly remembers the ladies of the church organizing the "hanging of the greens" after Thanksgiving, a tradition that continues to date.

Rose has long been involved in setting up the church for weddings, funerals, and receptions. She and Margaret purchased yards of fabric so that Ruth Hall could sew the fabric into pleated skirts to dress up tables for the receptions. Rose, along with her daughters Denise and Sherion, also cooked and served meals for children's ministry events for several years

Rose remembered all the meals that she and Margaret had cooked for Freedom House, a homeless shelter, over the years. Along with Elaine Pumaren and Cheryl Hall, Rose and Margaret cooked roast beef, macaroni and cheese, vegetables, and dessert for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter meals for the residents. Rose also worked faithfully to serve with CARITAS when the church hosted guests to stay overnight for one or two weeks at a time. She and Margaret shopped for supplies and Rose came early every morning to work alongside Frank Basil and others to cook a hot breakfast for the guests before they boarded the bus to go downtown for the day. Rose said the church initially hosted either the men's group or the women's group. After Nancy LePage joined the church the decision was made to host family

groups instead. Rose said she loved helping with the families, especially spending time at breakfast and in the evenings to hold the babies and care for the little children.

Rose said the Ruritans had met in the chapel building for years. Many of the members' wives provided the meal. At some point, the group asked Rose if she and Margaret would cook dinner for their meetings. She continued to cook for their meetings and the group continued to meet at Shady Grove up until a few years ago when they moved their dinner meetings to The Pickel Barrel restaurant owned by Sherion, Rose's daughter.

All of Rose's children have served at the church over the years. Mary Lee used some of her nursing training to help care for special needs children in the nursery. Rose noted that in the chapel there is a light near the door to the hallway. When they needed help in the nursery during a service, she would go turn on the light which would catch the attention of someone willing to go help! Sherion has provided food and helping hands for receptions and events in the fellowship hall. Bernard, Michael, and Floyd, Jr. have done everything from hanging drywall and fixing plumbing to exterminating snakes and setting up tables and chairs. Denise is currently on staff at the church, as a preschool teacher, childcare worker, and custodian.

Rose said one of the worst things about not being able to work at church is missing being with the babies and children in the nursery. She takes pride in the time she got down on the floor to work with a baby who was slow to walk. She says that after some time together in the nursery, that baby started to walk! Rose told about the time she made a place in the nursery for a special needs boy who was three years old, but couldn't manage in the older children's Sunday school room. She knows that by finding a place for that child, his parents were able to attend worship and know that their son was safe. Rose loves watching children grow up at church.

Rose is sad that she physically cannot do what she used to do, whether it is cleaning the church, or even taking care of her own home like she used to do. She says her left shoulder is nearly useless and causes a great deal of pain and she is considering surgery for it. In spite of the pain, she still welcomes her grandson, Landon, to spend most of his time at her house and she still cooks for her family.

She hopes to be able to watch online worship until the time we can worship together in the sanctuary.

On Sunday, May 2, we will honor Rose Farmer upon her retirement from Shady Grove UMC after more than 55 years of service. Rose has given so much of her life to SGUMC. What a gift she is, to her family and to her church family!

Lovingly submitted by Gregg Butler