

SENIOR LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITY: INTERVIEW WITH HAZEL SHEWELL

You have been identified by friends and colleagues as one of our community's 50 top senior sage leaders. A sage leader is a person who brings *unusual experience, sound judgment, and wisdom* in working to advance the civic well-being of our community. We thank you for participating in our interview process.

- 1. To begin, how many years have you lived in Nevada County, and where in the county do you reside?**

We moved to Nevada City 19 years ago and lived on Quaker Hill. After ten years, we moved into town due to my husband's health.

- 2. Are you working, semi-retired, or retired? May I ask how old you are?**

I am retired and will be 71 on my next birthday.

- 3. If you would, please share a bit about your personal history: where you grew-up; where you went to school and college; what organizations you have worked for and the positions you have held.**

I grew up in England and was given quite a bit of responsibility as a small child during the war. While most everybody else was evacuated, we lived in the country about 15-20 miles from London. This was a key area for the bombing, but we didn't leave because of my father's business. My mother and I evacuated to the North of London, but she didn't like it there so we returned home. Some of my early memories (age two or three) are of my father saying, "Now be a grown-up girl, and take Mommy to the air raid shelter." So I would be sent out ahead, in the dark, to turn the lights on there. My mother had another child, who later died, who I also took to the shelter while my father was off on "Home guard duty" patrolling for possible parachuters.

Being the oldest in the family by a number of years, I was sent off to boarding school, Farringtons School for Girls, at the age of ten. My brother and sister were seven and ten years younger than I, so we were like two families. It was always me and then the other children. Many boarding school students came from other countries, but we became homogenized because there were only certain days we were allowed out with our parents. It didn't matter that I was only five miles away from my home. The school was set-up in two big "houses" East House and West House with an equal number of girls plus the School House. Each house had its own teams, and we would compete against each other in sports. I played tennis, Lacrosse and netball, which is a sort of basketball game. We also played against other schools. At age 11 they put me on a debate team, and I was terrified because I was sent with other girls to debate other schools and I had never done anything like that before. I suppose because I talked a lot, they thought I must be able to debate!

However, they didn't really give me any training or exposure to it. I stayed at the boarding school until I was 17 ½, except for the year that my father took the whole family to Canada.

A few years ago, my former classmates and I decided to have a reunion and we spent the evening reminiscing. Only two of us said that we had enjoyed boarding school, and I was one. At school I had spent a lot of time sitting alone in the dining room where we all ate because I played around at the meal table so I was sent to the sideboard by myself as an example. I would not stop talking or sit still. The staff sent me to "Coventry" which meant that no one was allowed to talk to me for a prescribed number of days or till I behaved myself! Somehow, I outgrew those naughty days and finally did make it to be a Prefect, an honor for senior girls!

I attended high school in Canada during the year my father was doing research there. Having come from a girls' boarding school, this was a unique experience. I found that my prior schooling surpassed theirs. I was on the young side being 13 in the eleventh grade, so I had to be independent. We returned to England and back I went to Farringtons and left at 17-1/2yrs old. At 18, my father sent me to secretarial training school. He didn't believe in girls going to the university so didn't feel it was necessary for me. I was just anxious to get out of school.

I saved money during my secretarial training, and when I completed the course after a short stint working in my father's company and then for a lawyer in London, a girlfriend and I boarded a ship and sailed off for New York. I had just turned 21yrs old. There, we were employed as Kelly Girls for about five months, and I primarily worked in Rockefeller Center for one company at one job where they begged me to stay. It seems our skills were far superior to most girls doing secretarial work. Then my friend and I got on a plane and headed for San Francisco. I got a job with an investment counseling firm and worked there for a couple of years. Within the first year, I returned to England to marry an American I had met in New York. Upon returning to San Francisco, I went to work for Smith, Barney & Company Investment Brokerage.

After I was married a few years, I decided to stay home and have a family and some years later, we had a son. In the meantime, I got very involved in Moraga during those early years. There was a Welcome Wagon newcomers club, and out of that we created a woman's organization to conduct summer recreation programs for kids. I taught macramé! We eventually worked to get a proper park and recreation district. We took out a petition, walked neighborhoods explaining what we were doing, and got everyone's agreement for a dollar per \$100 to be added to the tax assessment. Because Moraga was not yet incorporated, we formed a Park's & Recreation Authority with a joint power of authority agreement between the county, the school district, and the fire district. I was appointed to the board and became President of the Park's and Recreation Authority. This was a very exciting time. Eventually we hired a proper recreation director, William Penn Mott Jr., the former Director of Parks & Recreation for the State of California, under Ronald

Reagan. He was retired and said, “Well, I think what you are doing is great. I am interested in helping you.” He worked on a miniscule salary because he had a pension and didn’t want to disturb that. He was a very motivating and innovative man and exposed us to a lot of ideas. So, that was a highly educating time for me.

4. **Is there a history of community service in your family background? If so, how would you describe it?**

No. My father was too involved in his business, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. My parents ended up moving to California because I was there and my brother was in college at Stanford. There, my mother did get involved in the community. The first civic thing that I got involved in, before I had my son, was a home for unwed mothers in San Francisco. This was during the era when families sent their pregnant unmarried daughters away. We would take these girls out for a day in the sun and a swim in pools at private homes. I think they never had more than six or eight girls at a time. That was the first time I did fund raising for a non-profit.

5. **What do you consider to be the major strengths and capabilities that have made you an effective community leader? Are they rooted in action, in your personal style, in your organizational, political, and personal relationships, or in something else?**

I have become a good listener and have always had thoughts and opinions about things and good insights. I believe I was helpful when the Hospitality House homeless shelter was started here. I had learned much about fund raising, and I shared that with them. Another strength is that I like people, like developing personal relationships, and this is essential in working in nonprofit organizations. Sometimes people are just attracted by the purpose of a nonprofit, but there is also the need to build relationships with others if the organization is to be successful.

I generally manage to stay apolitical, and that is important to me. When I come across those who have a different perspective, I don’t try to dissuade them. Rather, I keep the focus on what we are both interested in. I have always felt that teamwork is really important. I came from a boarding school background where it was teamwork that got stuff done. I like being part of a team and have never shied away from being the team leader.

6. **There are five key roles that civic leaders often play in their community. As you think about your own involvement in our community, which of these roles have you played and which do you consider to be your strongest?**

▪ ***Mentor: teaching and engaging others***

I consider myself a low-key mentor. In helping and engaging others, I don’t think of myself as a teacher.

▪ **Mediator: helping to resolve conflict**

I do think I am fairly good at helping to resolve conflicts. It goes back to listening and helping people to see a common goal and working together.

▪ **Monitor: serving as a community watchdog**

I don't really see myself as a community watchdog type. I have helped to build trails with the Gold Country Horsemen, and that was one of the first things my husband and I got involved with here. We had horses and wanted to know where the trails were, so the best way was to help build them. So I guess I was involved in monitoring then.

▪ **Mobilizer: working to bring about change**

It goes back to when I was greatly involved with the Parks & Recreation Region in Moraga, and then I was asked to chair a bond election for the school district. I didn't know anything about school districts at the time, but I now realize in hindsight that they asked me to do that job because I knew a lot of people and had good connections with them. I also was co-chair of the fire district tax election, and then I went on to serve as a fire commissioner.

▪ **Motivator: urging people to pursue worthy goals**

If I am able to motivate people, it is probably by example. Probably by engaging others through mentoring, and in the motivating other people.

7. **This project has to do with the involvement of sage leaders like yourself in civic organizations that seek to improve the quality of life and well-being of Grass Valley and Nevada City. This includes nine types of civic organizations:**

- **Fraternal and service clubs**
- **Social services organizations**
- **Educational organizations**
- **Governmental and political organizations**
- **Arts organizations**
- **Media organizations**
- **Faith-based organizations**
- **Environmental organizations**
- **Other nonprofit organizations**

In which of the nine types of civic organizations on the list are you *currently* involved? Overall, how many total hours a month do you give to these organizations?

Music in the Mountains, an arts organization here. When I am really heavily involved - it is 80-100 hours a month. It could add up to 20 hours a week and maybe more this next period. I also volunteer with Hospitality House 12 hours a month. Both are rewarding in very different ways – music soothes the soul and helping others help themselves is, in itself, rewarding.

8. **What is the name of the *one* organization on the list in which you are most involved and committed?...Were you invited to become involved or did you approach the organization and volunteer your services? Are you paid or unpaid? On average, how many hours a month do you give to this organization?**

Music in the Mountains. Since I was invited to join the board, I have been with the organization for about ten years. When I was first asked to join the organization, I was involved with the Foothill Theatre Company, so I said no. Besides, my husband was on the FTC board at that time. Later, I was asked again and I accepted. I am unpaid and average about 70 hours a month.

9. **I'd like to learn more about your involvement in this organization by asking four questions:**

First, describe the leadership role that you play within the organization.

I was President of the Music in the Mountains Board and am now actively involved with the organization's stewardship program. Its purpose is to involve all board members in helping to create and maintain teamwork. Also, we work to enhance connections among our donors, audience, and community members to make everything a great experience for our audiences. When I took over the president's job, we needed to create a team again because there was disharmony. That in itself was stewardship, getting teamwork to work again.

Second, in what ways do you believe you have *most* helped the organization?

As president of Music in the Mountains, I led the board back to being a team.

Third, as you think back over your involvement in the organization, what *roadblocks* have been most challenging?

There were difficult relationships between the staff and the board. Once you get focused on this team idea, you have got to make it work. We used the theme of a three-legged stool at a retreat, which I saw as a very valuable tool. We had new board members and had to find a way to get them to know other members. One of the things I remember so clearly is that we broke into three groups and recounted stories of what had led us into leadership roles. Some of the things we heard were amazing, and it opened our eyes to that person. It is really important to learn about other people, especially when you have so many people trying to relate.

Fourth, what experiences within the organization have given you the *most* meaning and satisfaction?

The most meaning and satisfaction has come from seeing improvement in board relationships, organizing and running successful events, and believing in the organization and it's purpose..

10. I want to ask you three additional questions about your civic involvements in our community:

First, what motivates or inspires you to engage in community activities and causes?

I really enjoy the comradery of working with people, and I get personal satisfaction from seeing a job/project completed.

Second, do you feel that you are sacrificing anything in your life by being deeply involved in our community's civic organizations?

No, I have never felt that.

Third, what personal benefits do you get from your civic involvements?

Having fun and developing a broad social network where we are all part of the cause. If people are not having fun, they can send money! but that is not what motivates me.

11. One of the benefits of growing older is that we are increasingly able to reflect on our experiences and to learn from them. Have you found any patterns of personal behavior no longer useful in your leadership role? If so, what are these and how have you changed?

I no longer have to be in charge! but I still like being involved and keeping my finger in the pie. I enjoy influencing others to take the lead, which is sometimes difficult. It takes awhile because if someone is doing a job well, others are reluctant to step in. You have to bring people along so they feel that you are not the only one capable of doing the job. In fact, I had quite a successful volunteer organization going when I was with Foothill Theatre Company. I said, "Okay I have been doing this for three years and want someone else to take it on." I couldn't get anyone to do it. They said, "Well, we are involved in volunteering because of you." So I had missed getting them dedicated to the cause, and I learned a lot from that. You have to keep reminding people what they are there for, to keep the cause going.

12. What leadership qualities do you most admire in effective leaders that you have known? Which of these qualities do you believe best describe your leadership?

To be able to listen to others and then articulate their thoughts succinctly, which is hard to do. Generating enthusiasm that culminates in positive action, and giving people a good sense that they are genuinely involved in something important. I do not know if I am as articulate in taking people's thoughts and synthesizing them, rather than just giving my own opinions. I am gradually learning that art. I feel that I am now becoming a good listener.

13. What, if any, spiritual traditions or practices do you most draw upon in exercising leadership?

I draw upon honesty and kindness.

14. How has your leadership style changed as you have progressed in life?

I am just not as bossy as I used to be!

15. What is the one mistake you see leaders making more frequently than others?

Talking too much - which is a trait of mine.

16. What are you doing to continue growing and developing as a leader?

That is not the goal I am aiming for. In fact, I am withdrawing from being a leader.

17. The two characteristics most often associated with sage leader wisdom are *unusual experience* and *the exercise of sound judgment*. What does having wisdom mean to you?

It is being knowledgeable about what you are involved with, including pitfalls.

18. What are the one or two peak experiences in your life that set you on the path you're on today?

My going to boarding school at a very young age and being put in a role of having to survive away from home. Also being a little leader in the sense of taking care of my mother at that very early age. I think landing in NYC with maybe \$200 in my pocket at the age of 21 set me up to be both independent and careful.

Later, in Moraga, I was asked to chair a major community event that involved coordinating a large committee and holding public meetings with all of the service organizations. My good friend talked me into this. It was very nerve-racking for me, but I learned a lot. I think that was probably the biggest undertaking I had ever done up to that point, and probably still is. It gave me good experience.

Another peak experience was being elected chair of the Moraga Park's & Recreational Authority. William Penn Mott Jr. was a great mentor to me. Being asked to take on this responsibility taught me a lot – especially to depend on other people who were much more knowledgeable than I was at the same time that they looked to me to keep them together.

19. You probably know other individuals who have sage leadership talents and skills but are not currently involved in the civic life of our community. Why do you believe they choose to be uninvolved? What, if anything, might be done to get them engaged?

First, they may not have been asked. Another reason is they may not have found an involvement that creates passion for them. A third is they may not see the value of involvement or may have lost passion for it and need to be brought back. Sometimes people work hard for something for a long time and then get tired of it, so the freshness is lost. It doesn't mean they can't be brought back in different ways, however. Also, some people are tired of responsibility and being asked for money. They don't want to be asked, and they don't want to ask others for money either. If they have had enough time off, they might be ready to get re-involved. People in leadership roles tend to enjoy their time, but a point comes when it is just too onerous.

To get younger, employed people involved, you have to find their interests. They might just be willing to work on some project. I think another way may be through the Nevada County Community Leadership Institute. You have to sell its value to them and to the community. Then you have to learn what young people are good at or might be good at. It is difficult when young people are employed because so many organizations meet during the day and are chaired by retired persons.

20. One final question: It is often said that the quality of life in our community is highly attractive and unusual. Do you believe this to be true? (If yes): What are the three or four things about our community that you most value and make you want to continue living here?

The small town atmosphere and historical significance are really important. The Arts are certainly what drew us here, and it is very sad that Foothill Theatre closed its doors. It's tough times for the Arts, but there are other theatres. The fact that there are so many retired, talented people who are willing to share their expertise enhances the quality of life here. We also have a wonderful support system through nonprofit organizations and their volunteers (e.g., Hospitality House) for people in need. I think ours has been a very generous community.

My husband and I chose to move here right after the Loma Prieta earthquake in the Bay Area. I was remarried and I said to my new husband, "We don't have to live on top of an earthquake zone." My husband and I wanted to start our marriage in a new community and create our identity together. I had also lived in Truckee between

marriages running the Truckee Hotel, so I had gotten very involved in that community and really liked it. We thought about moving there until friends said, "Remember the snow." We looked up and down the Sierra foothills, from Jackson and Sutter Creek to here. We decided to settle here because friends who were already living here said, "It's a really great place. The community has music and great theatre." My husband and I were into horseback riding then, and we found that attractive here. I still enjoy it but don't have horses anymore. I miss it, but have wonderful walks close at hand and in beautiful areas. There are so many wonderful simple things here, like the county fair, the open house at Bridgeport, and the Civil War Reenactment in the park. Our community is countrified and that's so fun to go and see. We're also not that far away from the San Francisco Bay Area, and having lunch a Tahoe is right next door.

21. Is there anything else you'd like to add or ask before we close?

No