





Dr. Melodye HILTON

JUSTICE FOR POWER AND EDUCATION

By Mikell Worley



Dr. Melodye Hilton is the founder of the Voice of Justice Foundation and the author of *Double Honor: Uprooting Shame in Your Life* (1999), as well as numerous other resources that she wrote in her quest to be a voice of hope for the neglected, abused, and shamed. She also co-founded the International Training Center in Central Pennsylvania where she serves as co-pastor with her husband. Through both organizations Dr. Hilton works to empower young people to become leaders and instruments of justice.

Born and raised in rural Lancaster County, Melodye was 16 years old before she saw her first “non-white” person. Yet prejudice was never a part of her life. “My family was very loving. As a child I never heard my parents say an unkind word about anyone—young, old, rich, or poor,” she recalls. “My dad died when I was 11 and I was raised by my mother with four older brothers.”

Melodye believes, “We are shaped by our experiences.” While she was still in high school, she vividly remembers an incident that made a strong impact on her sense of diversity. “My brother served his country in the Vietnam War and had many difficult experiences. One day [after he had returned from the war] someone made a racial comment and it infuriated my brother.” Hilton’s brother “refused to be silent in the face of prejudice.” He angrily informed the offender that while in Vietnam, he would have been killed except for “a black man [who] lost his leg while saving my brother’s life. It is a powerful story and reinforces that we Americans are all one. We have all contributed. I love our nation,” she declares.



From early on Melodye developed a love for different cultures and enjoyed traveling to Finland and Russia with Ambassadors for Friendship when she was 17 years old. “I wanted to learn more about the world. [So] I signed up for correspondence courses at Weaver Airline Personnel School while I was still in high school. I completed my resident training in Kansas City, Missouri.” However, not every memory from that time is good. One day while living in Kansas City, Melodye was attacked by a group of white men. Before anything could get out of hand, a black man came to her rescue. Once again the incident reinforced to her, both negatively and positively, that a person’s skin color has no bearing on their humanity.

While at the airline school, Melodye met an FBI agent who encouraged her to apply at the FBI in Washington, D.C. She applied, was accepted, and in 1973 she moved to the nation’s capital to work for the bureau. By this time Melodye had already encountered individuals who had used their power to try to hurt her, but she had also seen others who used their power to protect. She decided to dedicate her life for the good of others. Hilton worked hard in the laboratory division, learning about forensic and handwriting analysis, reviewing evidence, and making reports.

Yet Melodye wanted to do more. Her goal was to work with children and make a positive impact on their lives, so she began regular visits to a poor, high-crime black section of the city. “The taxi drivers were afraid to enter the area so they dropped me off a few blocks away and I had to

walk. I did crafts with the kids and they accepted me, as did many others.” Even so, Melodye recalls that, “during one visit, two black men literally escorted me out of the area.” To the detriment of the children in their own community, “they were prejudice against me because I was white, and they did not want me there. They told me not to come back if I valued my life. I never returned.”

In the meantime, Melodye did well at the FBI and continued to advance in her job. She loved living in D.C., where she walked to work each day. One day a hunch-backed street person caught her eye. For more than a year after that she regularly bought him a cup of coffee, and he would give a nod of appreciation but they never spoke. Then “one afternoon when I was walking home I saw him lying on the sidewalk. I knew immediately that something was wrong. People just ignored him and stepped round him, but as I got closer I realized he was in a pool of blood,” she recalls. “When I went into the liquor store for help the clerk told me he was ‘just a bum’ and refused to call an ambulance. I was irate and the clerk finally called, but when the ambulance arrived [the man] was pronounced dead. I cried the whole night.”

At that point Melodye made a conscious adjustment to her values. She began to believe that people did not really care about others, and she decided to look out only for herself and get ahead anyway she could. “Our experiences become our beliefs and our beliefs become our ex-

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Expectations. My experiences were teaching me to become angry and bitter. I appeared successful, but I was miserable only using others for my own gain.” She adds sadly, “I became an instrument of injustice.”

Working with the FBI gave Melodye access to high security information, and after two years working there, she became involved with a man who seemed to care about her. Yet Melodye soon discovered that he was using her to gain access to sensitive information. “I really loved him. When I realized that he was using me, it broke my heart. I went home and cried again for the first time in three years. That night I said, ‘God if You are there, do something in my life. I cannot do this anymore.’ When I woke in the morning my value system was instantly changed, and I began to live, once again, with a desire to use my life for the good of others—not for selfish gain or a veneer of success.”

Not long after that Melodye also realized she wanted to spend the rest of her life with Steven Hilton, a man who had been like a brother to her. They were married in 1976 and the couple will soon celebrate 33 years of marriage. Steven is from inner city Kansas City, Missouri, and they met in Washington, D.C., where Steven was stationed with the U.S. Navy. Although they both loved living in the capital, through a series of “guiding events we were drawn to Upper Dauphin, Pennsylvania.” They settled in Millersburg to start a church, Giving Light Christian Fellowship, which serves as the umbrella organization to the International Training Center.

However, soon after the couple set to work, “we were frustrated at the lack of diversity and began to invite people from different cultures to attend to share a variety of perspectives.” At first the community did not understand this country church with a “city edge.” Even so, eventually the Hiltons were accepted into the community where they have now lived for 27 years.

Yet, that is not where the story ends. Hilton’s quest for justice springs from many influences, including her own experience with abuse as a young girl. It took her decades to work through the resulting mental and emotional hurt that came with it. Consequently, she has dedicated her life in an effort to prevent others from experiencing such pain. That drive combined with Melodye’s love of babies, children, and youth led her to open the Voice of Justice Foundation, which seeks to be a source

of hope, hands of rescue, and instruments of justice on behalf of the neglected, abused, or shamed.

“Injustice is an abuse of power, while justice is the proper use of that power. Our goal is to use our influence and resources to be an instrument of justice on behalf of children,” Melodye explains. “We provide national and international scholarships for potential young leaders to receive training, mentorship, and [opportunities for developing] character.

We aid in the rescue of orphans and other children in developing nations, and we partner with other non-profits to build schools and orphanages and to rescue children from abuse and prostitution.” Through her international travels Melodye met Silja, a young Norwegian girl from Oslo who had suffered sexual, physical, and mental abuse.

The two women felt a deep connection, and in June 2002 Silja arrived at the center, broken and enraged. Silja worked hard with the Hiltons to begin the difficult process of healing, and her bond with the couple grew. Once she received her permanent resident status, Silja legally changed her name to Hilton, and Melodye and Steven “adopted” her into their family. Silja now works at the center and is 26 years old. The Hilton’s son, Joel, 28 years old, is married and works at the center full time. Their daughter, Rebecca, also married, is 30 and works



for Harristown Development Corporation in Harrisburg.

Together the family forges a legacy of hope, acting as a bridge of resources to help young people all round the world reach their potential. For more information on the Voice of Justice Foundation (and to read Silja’s story) visit the web at www.givinglight.org/voiceofjustice/. The International Training Center’s website is www.goitc.org. ❀

Mikell Worley is the founder and president of Mikell’s Treasures. She has spent more than 20 years designing and delivering self-improvement trainings, has had several cover stories in various magazines, and recently illustrated her first children’s book. She is an advocate for women and children.