



Fighting Hunger, Feeding Hope

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“We were raised very poor,” Doris says. “There was no such thing as a food bank when I was a kid.”



Doris Schoonover knows hunger. She has seen it from every angle.

In the 1930s, Doris was just a child when her father died. She and her six brothers and sisters were raised by their mother in rural Perry County, surviving on a meager \$40 a month. It was the Great Depression, a time when modern conveniences like cars were only for the wealthy.

“We were raised very poor,” she says. “There was no such thing as a food bank when I was a kid.” From her mother, Doris learned to be frugal and work hard, stretching her money and resources as far they would go. Her fortitude has served her well.

Doris and her husband, Clinton Schoonover, raised four children – three boys and one girl. When their daughter, the oldest, married and moved away, Doris and Clinton took in a foster child. Within a few months, they adopted the boy, adding a fifth child to their family.

The Schoonovers lived in Farmington, Mo., a small town in St. Francois County. Clinton spent much of his life working as an automatic screw machine operator for companies such as Moog Automotive.

When Clinton became totally disabled and terminally ill at age 51, Doris chose to take care of him at home instead of sending him to a nursing home. She devoted

St. Francois County



Doris Schoonover and her fellow volunteers unpack banana boxes of donated food at the Farmington Ministerial Alliance in St. Francois County, Missouri. The food pantry provides food assistance to

the next eight and a half years to caring for her husband in their home. He died in 1988.

“When he died I had no income,” Doris says.

Doris worked for three years, until she was old enough to draw social security.

The year was 1992. Doris remembers, because that was the first time in her life she had to turn to a food pantry for help. The social security she received wasn't enough to pay the bills and have enough left over for food.

Doris' sister had heard of a place in Farmington where people could go to receive help with groceries. That's what sent Doris to the Farmington Ministerial Alliance, a partner agency of the St. Louis Area Foodbank.

When she arrived looking for help, the pantry directors asked if she'd be willing to volunteer. Doris was happy to oblige. That was 19 years ago; she's been volunteering there ever since.

“I was telling one of them the other day that when they broke me in we had one customer all day long,” Doris says. “Now we have as many as 45 in three hours.”

The pantry is open 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Doris, 79, and her sister, Thelma Sales, 86, work every Tuesday and Thursday, and one day on the weekend to stock the shelves, rotate the food and clean.

Over the years, Doris has done just about every job at the pantry, from filling out the client paperwork to driving to the St. Louis Area Foodbank to pick up the food. She sees her 19 years of volunteer work at the pantry as a way of giving back for the food she receives.

“I earn what I get down there at the pantry. That's the way I feel about it,” Doris says. “I do anything there is to do. I really enjoy it.”

Doris is a firm believer in working for what you're given, and taking care of others – two things that have undoubtedly kept her active thus far.

“I don't ask for food stamps as long as I can get by without them. I don't believe in that,” Doris says. “As long as I can make ends meet I'm fine. I get everything I got from yard sales.”

Doris has seen a lot of folks come through the doors at the pantry in her 19 years, and her heart has gone out to many of them.

“The majority do have it hard,” Doris says. “By the time you pay taxes, gasoline, phone, truck insurance... there's nothing left.”

But thanks to the food pantry, Doris manages to get by.



hundreds of families in need each month.

“It’s a big help,” she says.

Doris says she doesn’t ask her children for help because they have their own families to think about now. She has eight grandkids and 15 great-grandkids, and maybe they’re partly the reason why the children at the pantry always touch her heart.

“We were poor when we were kids, and I guess that’s why my heart goes out to the little kids – they didn’t ask for this,” Doris says.

Doris shared her story in March 2012 with Bethany Prange, communications coordinator at the St. Louis Area Foodbank. Her personal circumstances may have changed since the original interview.



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