

Remarks at the Funeral of...

Delvonnia Monique Bradshaw

1964-2024

Laid to rest: Saturday, July 20, 2024

Good morning. Let me see if I can say this with a straight face as I look out on this sea of faces: *Von Bradshaw was a private person.*

Seriously, one of the things I heard most from Von was some version of this: “*Kevin, I don’t really deal with a lot of people.*” That’s clearly not the whole picture. I’m looking at more than 200 people who would beg to differ.

The other phrase I heard most often from Von is this: “*What are you gonna do?*”

That’s probably what I still hear loudest in my ear from Von Bradshaw. *What are you gonna do? What are we gonna do?* And she meant it in at least three ways. Sometimes, it was Von’s way of giving it up to God. Often uttered rhetorically after unfathomable losses or amid organizational circumstances we could not change. “*What are you gonna do?*”

Sometimes it was a suggestion you couldn’t say “no” to. Like when she strode into my office and surveyed the endless clutter and the total lack of a filing system: “*OK, Kevin. What are we gonna do about this?*” And sometimes, it was a rallying cry or a direct challenge: “*What are you gonna do?*” *OK. Things didn’t go the way we had hoped. Life moves on. How do we navigate this? Onward. What are you gonna do next?*

And the art of working with Von, of knowing Von, of loving Von Bradshaw, was knowing – when she said those words – which thing she meant by it.

I was just a 22-year-old kid at Health Care for the Homeless when Von Bradshaw first came in January of 1994 as a part-time administrative assistant through a temp agency. Though Von would later tell me that she never-ever worked part time. And Jackie Gaines, our CEO at the time, made her an official HCH staff member a short time later, by January 31, saying that she was simply “too good” not to hire on the spot. Jackie called her both “sunshine” and a “rock” during those difficult early years. We were a small agency of 30 people at the time.

She would go on to advance our mission to prevent and end homelessness as an Executive Assistant for more than 30 years, supporting a growing staff (now over 200 – many here today), an evolving Board of Directors (for some of our Board and Committee members, Von Bradshaw was the person which whom they communicated most), and three CEOs – Jackie, who regrets that she can’t be here this morning, Jeff Singer, who spoke a short while ago, and me for the better part of the past 13 years. I mean this both literally and metaphorically: *When life did what life does, good or bad, Von was the person who sent the flowers.*

The day after I was named CEO, Von walked into my office and said “*OK, Kevin, what are we gonna do?*” We would grow to serve more than 11,000 people a year. And Von saw every single person we worked with – no matter the challenges they were facing – as a person. A human being. Over the

years and especially in the early years, there really wasn't a single organizational initiative that didn't in some way bear Von's indelible fingerprints.

She was known as *Von*. Occasionally *Delvonia*. Most commonly, *Ms. Von*. After her family held her 50th birthday party at our clinic, and hearing how the family referred to her, I once tried "*Vonnie*." And I got the look. (You know the look.) I never tried that again.

For many, including me, Von was their most trusted colleague and a dear friend. And it was clear to all of us how much she loved her family and extended family, referring often to her brother...and the person we call our brother. Her sister, her other sister, and the person we call our sister. Aunts and uncles and the people we call our aunts and uncles... (you get the idea of the tremendously open arms of the Bradshaw family). She spoke often of her father, whose death she still mourned, and her beloved mother, here today.

We've identified six *core values* as an agency – the things that best describe us: *Dignity. Authenticity. Hope. Justice. Passion. Balance.* And Von Bradshaw embodied those values every day. Many of us can't imagine a Health Care for the Homeless without Von in it. Or a family without Von a part of it.

Von has lived her life. She completed her mission. She has made the world better than she found it. If Von were here now – and we know she is – I like to think that she would walk out into the center of the room and look around at each of us and say: "*OK, everyone. What. Are we. Gonna do?*"