

[0:00:00]

*Max Delsignore:* Northern New York Community Podcast. Stories from the heart of our community.

Hi there and welcome to another podcast that I can promise you will be one of the most memorable ones that we have. I'm your host, Max Delsignore, it is our pleasure to have one of the North Country's most impactful philanthropist, Mr. Richard MacSherry here with us. We will speak with Dick about growing up along the Saint Lawrence River, developing a successful trucking business, and how his purpose for helping others came to be. And we're also joined by Dick's daughter, Molly MacSherry MacWade. Molly also grew up in Watertown in the Alexandria Bay area and is currently an active reverend at Saint Philip's Episcopal Church in Jackson, Mississippi.

And in fact Molly was chosen as the state's first Episcopal – female Episcopal priest I should say, in 1980. But her love for the North Country has never waned, and we're excited to have you both here and thanks again for joining us.

*Molly MacSherry:* Thank you.

*Richard MacSherry:* Welcome.

*Max Delsignore:* Dick, at 98 years young, you are still quite active. You go out in Saint Lawrence River as often as you can and you row your boat. What do you do on a daily basis to stay active?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, I really – I have one thing I have to do every day, I have to ride a stationary bike for at least probably half an hour. And that gives my – it gets me going a little bit, and gets me in shape to face another day of relatively easy nothing.

*Molly MacSherry:* Jeez.

*Max Delsignore:* Now, rowing a boat, you row about three miles a day when you get a chance to go out -

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, not always. Between two and three miles. This is in the Saint Lawrence Skiff, which is a narrow – a rowboat, double ended boat, and I love to have somebody in the stern. And there's a nice chair made just for rowboats back there, Molly can sit in that and occasionally I have my lady friend sitting back there, so I have something to look at when I'm rowing, because when you're

rowing you can't see where you're going. And of course the easiest way to steer is to have somebody tell you where you're going. Well, I can row by myself, it's not any problem, but you have to turn around look where you're going. With a good guide in the stern, I just keep right on rolling.

*Max Delsignore:* The Saint Lawrence River is – has been part of your fabric, your life story.

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, my family, way back, owned a good sized island on the Saint Lawrence River, and a small island, both islands were connected with a bridge and it was a great spot to be brought up in, because I could go fishing all the time, we had a sand bay where if I had to I could go down and make sandcastles and do things like that. We had a caretaker and his wife there all the time, year round. So always somebody. And that was a very pleasant bringing out for me. So I kept doing that until the island was sold about 1980, and then I – prior to that I got – had gotten married and my wife was also a lady who lived on the same islands all her life.

So when we got – decided to get married, she agreeably went to a little island that I owned and found out when we had three children that little islands aren't the greatest places for kids, because everybody thinks they're going to fall in the river all the time. Well, they do once in a while, so you have to watch them, and so then we moved over to the main shore, where it was a little better. A little bit of protection for the children.

*Max Delsignore:* What makes the Saint Lawrence River in the area so special to you?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, to me, first of all it's pure water. A lot of people say, you know, well, look at those ships going through and they're dirty ships and stuff. But everything's required to have holding tanks and septic tanks and things like that, and I will drink the water out of the river any time. Maybe I like to get a little way from shore, but you can see the rock bottom down probably 15 or 20 feet, and it's almost as clear as the ocean. And it's a wonderful place to be, the water kind of cold in the spring but in the summertime it's delightful for swimming and boating and any activity.

*Max Delsignore:* When did you decide to settle in the North Country? You'd spent many summers up along the Saint Lawrence River, how old were you when you settled here in Northern New York?

*Richard MacSherry:* Probably about 28, after I got out of the service, yes.

*Molly MacSherry:* You were 28 years old, right?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, I got out of the service about then I think.

*Max Delsignore:* How long did you serve for in the military?

*Richard MacSherry:* I served in the military until I was discharged, before Hiroshima. The day before Hiroshima I was discharged in the Philippine Islands.

*Max Delsignore:* What did that experience, serving for your country, what did that mean to you, or what did you take away -

*Richard MacSherry:* Well -

*Max Delsignore:* - from that?

*Richard MacSherry:* - a little background here, I was working for a company in Philadelphia, making navel guns carriages for railroad cars, then I decided I'd go to Canada and see if I could get a job with something called the British Purchasing Commission. Well, they gave me a job, but the day that I came back from Ottawa, Ontario with the idea that I'm going to work for the British government, that was the day the war started. So I didn't go to the commission, I went right into the navy. And in the navy I ran a 50 foot boat for 2 years. Yeah, a landing craft, and that was fine and fortunately I didn't get hurt, but a few people did, a lot. So my experience with the navy was fine. I was honorably discharged in – the day the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

*Max Delsignore:* What are your first memories about settling in this area as an adult?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, I knew the winters were going to be cold. No doubt about that. I had been living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We had a – this island I lived on, we had a large cottage that was closed in the winter, but – there was a cottage where the caretaker lived with his wife and children, and I decided to try this – I would see – I went up there and stayed with him for two or three weeks and find out, well, I think I can handle the North Country. So then I came up here and found a place to live and then I was married now. So my wife and I lived here for 50 years.

*Max Delsignore:* When did you meet your wife? When did you meet Mary?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, in days of yore, the [Inaudible: 0:07:59 South Island?] Yacht Club was quite a central point of the river, of the social life in the Saint Lawrence. My wife was a daughter of the – commodore of the yacht club. Granddaughter, I should say. And every year he decided that it was necessary to have all the children assemble and have their pictures taken as a group. Well, I did that, and one day I was called to sit up to be there, and I was probably five years old, and this little girl came alongside and sat down beside me. Because she was told to, not because she wanted to. I smiled at her and that was the first time I saw her, and we then gradually got together later on.

*Max Delsignore:* What – where did, I should say, the idea and motivation to start the Seaway Motor Express company, where did that come from?

*Richard MacSherry:* When I moved to Watertown I didn't have a job. Well, I had been working for the marina in Alexandria Bay, a man named Glen Furnace was the marine architect, and he had me over that marina in Ogdensburg, which I did, and for a good reason, because after the war it was impossible to buy motors for boats, and the fact that I had been with a company called – in New Orleans -

*Molly MacSherry:* Higgins.

*Richard MacSherry:* - Higgins, Higgins. And Higgins was given motors by the government, because they had done a great job during the war of making landing crafts and ships. So I was assigned to Ogdensburg to open up a marina and sell Higgins boats. And that was fine, so I spent my first winter up here in Ogdensburg. Then I was moved to Alex Bay and worked there for a while, and then I decided to get married, so I stopped my job then and went on a wedding trip, came back, and was sort of at a loss what to do and a friend of mine said I need a little help in the trucking business. So I worked with him for a while and finally I bought him out, and then I decided I – we had to expand or go broke.

So I started buying some trucks, and I had good luck with the bank, they were very kind to me. Would lend me money at a reasonable rate, and then I found out the best way to make any money was to pay cash for boats, so I started making money out for trucks, and then I was in the trucking business and I bought some property and built a terminal, built a repair shop, built a storage – built place. It went pretty well.

*Max Delsignore:* How far was the reach? What was the area -

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, the whole -

*Max Delsignore:* - for your business?

*Richard MacSherry:* - the state of New York, to Albany, and then I had New York City too.

*Max Delsignore:* How did the industry, or was the industry evolving at that time, with railroad being so prevalent in the country, and maybe more folks moving to -

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, the railroad -

*Max Delsignore:* - more of the trucking business?

*Richard MacSherry:* - was – yes, but they turned out to be one of my best customers. And the reason for that was that railroads under the ICC were required to handle any shipments. So, there were between here and Massena for instance, New York, there were probably about five stations, and the railroad was required to service those stations when they had freight. Okay, so all of a sudden the railroads found out that they were delivering hundred pound packages to a little station somewhere along the line, and just think about that, then they had to take a railroad car, load it with this hundred pound thing, attach it to a locomotive and deliver it to the station. And then a couple days later come back and get the railroad car.

Very expensive and it did what it was supposed to do. So I suggested to the railroad that they might be sensible if we put some trucks on. So we had trucks marked by the New York Central Railroad pacemaker, and these went out every morning about seven or eight of them in different directions, delivering railroad freight. But we didn't have to leave the car – the trucks there, and we could bring them back, and we could do it a lot cheaper than running a steam locomotive up the tracks to some little station. So that turned out very well and I did a – the railroad finally decided that maybe it was not a bad thing to do, so they bought me out. Which was okay. So that was the way I got started.

*Max Delsignore:* What do you think were the keys to the success of your business during that time?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, a lot of competition. Prompt delivery was the key to the trucking business. But, we also – really what we enjoyed most, or what we profited most was by truck loads, and we were finally connected with quite a few of the big companies, like Saint Regis

and Aluminum Company of America, Reynolds Metal and we would take – have truck loads every day in and out of these places. And that was lucrative. So that was probably really the backbone of my business, the – when I finally got going that was what we wanted most, and that’s what we – had – sales went out like any other business, selling for us, so that worked out.

*Max Delsignore:* You and your wife were very engaged in this community, helping others in so many different ways. Do you remember when you first – as you got settled here in Northern New York, do you remember when you first started to become engaged with non-profit organizations, or volunteer for certain agencies?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, probably the first place I started was my church. Not that I was – I couldn’t do a great deal for the church but used to work for them and I was also – I was a Sunday school teacher for a while and that was a pleasant part of church business. And I got more involved with the church as time went on.

*Max Delsignore:* Which church was this?

*Richard MacSherry:* What was it, Molly?

*Molly MacSherry:* Trinity.

*Richard MacSherry:* Trinity Church, excuse me. I have a few little memory losses occasionally.

*Max Delsignore:* Your mind’s still very sharp, I think.

*Molly MacSherry:* It is. It is.

*Richard MacSherry:* I couldn’t remember the church I went to. That’s not -

*Molly MacSherry:* You go to so many.

*Richard MacSherry:* - that’s not good, yes.

*Max Delsignore:* Do you feel like church in a lot of ways provides some of those foundational values or principles of being able to go out and help others, or the willingness to go and help others?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, I suppose it did. I don’t remember it necessarily doing that, but – and I don’t know what else did, so let’s blame it on the church. That’s fine, yeah. The church has changed a lot, because unfortunately we’re – older people are still going but the younger

people don't go anymore much. Even though no matter what we do to try to attract them. And so now, you know, we used to have ten or twelve Sunday school classes, and now it's diminished a great deal. But I still go to church. I had better go to church. I have a daughter who is an Episcopal priest and I get very much reminded that Sunday, you're supposed to go to church, so I do. And I like it now.

*Max Delsignore:* One thought that you had mentioned, or something you had shared was you and your wife had been married for 50 years, you did a lot together -

*Richard MacSherry:* We did.

*Max Delsignore:* - how important was it to volunteer and be so active in the community to do all that together?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, she was active, I don't think I was terribly active. My business took a lot and you know, we did talk things over and do what we could. And she was in several groups that were philanthropic and I was very proud of her and she was well recognized as an important participant in various philanthropic ways.

*Max Delsignore:* Are there a couple examples or memories, or one or two that stand out in your mind of things that your wife had done that you felt proud of, or you felt proud of doing together?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, she – that's a question I really have to think over.

*Molly MacSherry:* Well, could I -

*Richard MacSherry:* Yes, you -

*Richard MacSherry:* - jump in?

*Max Delsignore:* Please.

*Molly MacSherry:* Well, I remember as a very young girl going with my mom delivering meals with the meals on wheels program, and I was – I mean I was just a little girl and she would take me and the meal and deliver it to whomever it was we were helping and she was so kind. Not only did she just – did she present the meal to the person or the family, but she would stop and talk with them and see how they were doing and see if there was anything else she could do for

them, and that stuck with me. I mean still, it's still very much with me now. So I remember that as a little girl.

*Max Delsignore:* One of the questions I had for you, Molly, too, was to dovetail off your comment, what other examples or values stand out to you as you look at – as you reflect, I guess, upon what your parents have done to help others over their lifetime?

*Molly MacSherry:* I don't remember a time when there – when they didn't help the community. I mean I remember being at home with my mom and pop going out and he did a lot as he said for the church, for Trinity Church, a great deal, and he was involved in all aspects. He was my – you know, my Sunday school teacher one year, which was fun. He's hilarious, so it was a lot of fun. Always looking for places where they could be of help. Whether they had a lot of money at that point or not, that wasn't the deciding factor. They looked around and saw what the Salvation Army was doing and the United Way was doing and they wanted to be a part of that. And I remember all of that clearly.

*Max Delsignore:* Dick, how important is it to share the value of helping others with your family? It's obviously made an impact on your daughter.

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, I've tried to encourage them to get involved in community affairs. They did somewhat, but my two sons moved away when they got old – after finished college, and they couldn't very well do much up here at that time. One of them lived in New York, the other guy lived in Tennessee, that's right.

*Max Delsignore:* Where, if you could, I know it's kind of hard to describe and you talked about it a little bit in your story, but those values, the willingness to help, if you could go back to a point in your time where you felt that was the moment where you understood how important it was to help others, when would that be?

*Richard MacSherry:* I really can't specify a time that I started getting really involved in trying to help others, but it was after I'd – after I'd seen some situations where it – disturbing to me because people needed help and weren't getting it. And I can't specifically tell you what date that was, or even where it was, but I know that does concern me always.

*Max Delsignore:* Can you share one of the stories that you remember, just that stood out in your mind?

*Richard MacSherry:* I'm trying to think back. See, I've got a long way to go back -

*Max Delsignore:* Yeah.

*Richard MacSherry:* - you've got a 98-year-old who – you've been around a while.

*Max Delsignore:* Yeah.

*Richard MacSherry:* Yeah, I had a man working for me and he was old enough to retire. He did retire while working we – he – he was a poor man and worked very hard for me and he retired before old age and his wife was somewhat ill. So I helped him with a house, by getting a house, and I made – I paid a pension to him, which I was not required to do but I started doing that for him, and I felt pretty good about that because he was a deserving guy and poor and not – with no resources at all.

*Max Delsignore:* You and your family have been generous supporters to a number of local non-profits. The library now at Alexandria Bay is one that's very close to your heart, and I know you'd mentioned previously in a conversation we had about its progress. Why has the library meant so much to you?

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, first of all our little town of Alexandria Bay had a library, and was – it got a little larger, and they bought a house next door, and they had a passageway between the house next door and the library. Well, it was very difficult for – we only had one library and I think most of the time to try to see what was going on in the other house. I don't mean to say there's any hanky panky stuff. The librarians always keep an eye on people and the young children and things like that. So I noticed – I've forgotten what year it was, it was probably around 1980 I think, or earlier maybe. The city – Alexander Village decided to build a new city hall and the fire department together.

Well, I saw the building going up and it was a big lot next to the building. So I went to the mayor, who was a lady, and I said, 'Look, I want four acres.' 'What for?' I said, 'I want to build a library.' 'Are you sure you're going to do it?' I said, 'I am sure.' So she said, 'Alright, you take the land.' She gave me the land, I gave the library the land, I didn't want the land, and we started building a library. We built one section and found out that it was doing very well, needed more room. So we built another section and we built a computer room, not a big one, only got ten or twelve computers in it. And then after that that library was doing well, we needed a bigger space, so we built a public room that we used for a lot of different purposes.

And that turned out to be – we have art exhibits, we have all kinds of programs; we have oil painting programs, we have reading and we have a children’s hour every week, and get quite a few young children. We have a great girl who does – specializes in that, and she does a fine job. And children are coming in and out all the time, and that is one of the goals that I had. I really – it wasn’t a goal because I didn’t know it could be done. I mean I didn’t know much about libraries except that I thought we needed one, and it has grown and has raised one of the best small libraries in the New York state.

*Max Delsignore:* Your willingness to see that project through, and to make that happen to strengthen a local institution like a library -

*Richard MacSherry:* Yeah.

*Max Delsignore:* - obviously meant – means a lot to that area.

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, I hope it does.

*Max Delsignore:* How important is the concept of philanthropy, and not just a financial gift but volunteering, giving your time and your talent, how important is that to this area’s future?

*Richard MacSherry:* I don’t like the word philanthropy very much, it indicates something large and glorious and magnanimous and stuff. I don’t think of it, I like – I just do what I think is just plain sensible giving without any idea of any return to me. As long as it’s – you know, as long as the donations I’ve given to anything are well used, and that seems to be the way I look at things and it may be a little juvenile to talk that way but when I see a need or I see somebody in trouble, I mean I put quite a few children through college too. I like to do that. And I’ve picked a couple of them off the street. ‘What are you doing? What grade are you in?’ ‘Well, I’m in the ninth grade,’ or whatever the top grade is.

‘What are you going to do?’ ‘Well, I’d like to go to college but I can’t afford it.’ And I really have gotten a lot of pleasure out of that, and got a lot of good responses from the people I’m trying to help.

*Max Delsignore:* Molly, is there another local project, charitable effort that your father, your parents have supported that sticks out in your mind, or you feel was profiled, or made a difference in the area?

*Molly MacSherry:* They – well, actually both my mom and dad were interested in the hospital here, for one thing. Samaritan Hospital. And all of the services that provides for the North Country, and also they were very interested in hospice, the hospice that was built fairly recently. And when my mom died pop continued with that interest. He found out what specific needs were to both the hospital and the hospice, gave large donations to both, and the donations have turned out to be just – I mean the result of the donation turned out to be just superb, just wonderful, and helping in the quality of life, of the people that the hospital and the hospice served. So -

*Max Delsignore:* If you could look back, I kind of asked this question earlier but I'll phrase it different way, the lessons that your parents have taught you, what are maybe the one or two things that as you practice as a reverend, your church in Mississippi, that you've kind of carried through your mission, and with those parishioners that are in your church?

*Molly MacSherry:* The major lesson that I have learned is to never stop giving. Because in giving you receive so much more in your own life, and so the churches are served in Mississippi in terms of the parishioners, I've listened, like pop does, I've listened about what the needs are in the community and you know, you can imagine, in Jackson, Mississippi, there's a lot of need. And have gotten the parishioners, or helped the parishioners see the vision of giving to the greater community, not just stick with the church community, but the greater community, and reach out and be part of ministries that help people who are poor, or sick, or hungry or homeless, or just vast needs.

And I learned that from both my parents, but particularly pop, really. You never stop, you just don't stop. He hasn't stopped. He helped somebody this weekend, who just came across his life and he helped him, so it's very inspiring to me. He is.

*Richard MacSherry:* I want to give you one specific interest that I really get a great deal of satisfaction, it's the Salvation Army. I didn't realize their need much and I couldn't do a lot to help. But one year I did, decided just before Christmas to take in a check for 5000 dollars. The major in charge was a lady, an older lady, and she said, 'Well, that's going to help us a lot.' So the next year I did the same thing, and I think I gave a little more. And she said, 'Now, look, would you – I want to take you out for lunch.' I said, 'I don't want to go out for lunch, I want to stay here for lunch.' So I had dinner, a luncheon with all the people who they served, and then she said, 'I want to show you something.'

She had a big gymnasium and the gymnasium floor was completely covered with small bags of candy, clothes -

*Molly MacSherry:* Toys.

*Richard MacSherry:* - toys, and I was so impressed to think that Watertown has so many people in need, and so many children who don't have much else, and I don't mean to particularly point out that that is the only institution in town that helps people, it isn't. But I've started going back there quite a lot, and it is a source of pleasure for me to see what's going on, see who's helping who, who needs help, and the people that have meals, and I sit down with them and they aren't what you call gourmet meals, but they're healthy meals and the people come in, some of them don't say anything, just come in and eat and leave. Because I'm sure they're needy and the army I think recognizes who is needed – in need. And that's my pitch for the Salvation Army.

*Max Delsignore:* They will be grateful, I'm sure.

*Molly MacSherry:* That's right.

*Max Delsignore:* Your generation, and many in your generation have demonstrated that the active approach, proactive approach really of helping their community, how critical is it to educate the younger generation about what it means to help others in need?

*Richard MacSherry:* How do you do that? I'm not sure how you would do that. If you don't do it at home probably the schools are not going to teach that. I don't mean they'd be against it but it might not be in the curriculum for that particular grade or – so I – I think it's up to the parents who've seen the need themselves, and maybe had their own needs helped by someone else to teach the children the importance of giving and organizations like the United Way, who help a lot of people.

*Max Delsignore:* Molly, as we wrap up, I want you to complete the following two sentences. They're very easy. The first one starts like this: Richard MacSherry is. I want you to fill in the rest of that sentence.

*Molly MacSherry:* Richard MacSherry is giving, inspiring, imaginative, forward-looking, very bright, very bright, funny, funny-funny, humorous, quick witted, generous. Obviously very generous. Encouraging, ageless -

*Richard MacSherry:* I'm going to run out of that pretty soon.

*Molly MacSherry:* No, you're not. Got another 20 years, pop, at least.

*Richard MacSherry:* You want to see a dried up prune? Come back in 20 years.

*Molly MacSherry:* I'll be with you.

*Max Delsignore:* Do you want me to give you -

*Molly MacSherry:* Loving.

*Max Delsignore:* Loving. So here's the second sentence. The legacy of Richard and Mary MacSherry will always be, what?

*Molly MacSherry:* The legacy is the result of their desire to give, ability to give, appreciation to be able to give, joy in giving, and you can put this somewhere in there, but varied giving. It's not all one type of giving. They give in various ways and their legacy will be – also will be that they have given to large organizations and to individuals in need. And everywhere in between.

*Max Delsignore:* Last question for you, Dick. If you had a classroom of high schoolers in front of you, and you had a message to share with them, to inspire them to help others in their community, what would you say is the most important message you would share with that group, to encourage them to do so?

*Richard MacSherry:* I would tell them education is the key to a successful life. If you're educated you can – you'll probably be paid a reasonable amount of money to keep yourself going, and maybe your family. You must be educated if possible, or look for ways to get help to get educated. It can be done. And then I would say that if you're being helped by someone, don't forget to help someone else. Do it in return. You may be a little later, or many years later, but do it, because people need your help just as much as you needed theirs.

*Molly MacSherry:* And I want to say two words that he says to me every time we speak on the phone. The last two words he says is carry on, carry on.

*Max Delsignore:* Well, Dick, I hope you always know how special and thoughtful your willingness to help others in this region has meant. Thank you for being a model for all generations on how to help others and be devoted to the community.

*Richard MacSherry:* Well, thank you.

*Max Delsignore:* And Molly, thank you for being here to share an additional perspective on your father and your family, as well as your values. It was a tremendous privilege and honor to have this opportunity to ask these questions and visit with you both.

*Molly MacSherry:* Thank you, Max.

*Max Delsignore:* Folks, that's it for another addition of the podcast. Many thanks again to Mister Richard MacSherry and Molly MacSherry MadWade for sharing their stories on this platform. Again, this production isn't possible without the help and support from WPBS TV and the Northern New York Community Foundation. Please continue to listen for more stories about our community on the podcast. Thanks again for joining us and we'll catch you back here soon.

Northern New York Community Podcast. Stories from the heart of our community.