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CHAMPION

April 2025

A Legacy of
Generosity



Barbara Sadler
at UMFS (bottom
row, middle)



Left to right:
Jerry-Grace Sadler, Bruce Sadler, Barbara
Sadler, Brian Sadler, and Karla Sadler.

Barbara displays
her 1955 class
photo.



A Legacy of Generosity

Like his mother, Bruce Sadler grew up spending time on the UMFS campus, but in a different capacity.

“A lot of my childhood memories involve UMFS,” Bruce said. “We visited the UMFS campus at least weekly to volunteer during the summer when I was not in school. My parents would also host children in our home during the holidays to give them a family environment. I think these experiences gave me a feeling of being part of UMFS.”

Bruce Sadler was inspired by his parents to continue supporting UMFS, and he hopes others are too.

“I believe my mom is forever grateful for what UMFS did for her, and she feels that she can never fully repay that debt,” Bruce said. “That is why I continue to support UMFS. I know she is proud of what UMFS has become and the many ways it continues to be an unwavering champion for its kids, their families, and their communities.”

At UMFS, we know the transformative impact that strong, positive relationships with a trusting adult can have on a child. “Relationships are our building blocks,” has been a cornerstone of our culture for over 125 years, embraced daily by our staff, families, donors, and volunteers. Barbara Sadler’s story beautifully illustrates the lasting impact of this value and its life-changing effect.

Barbara knows what it’s like to be on both sides of this relationship—first as a child in need of support during her time at The Methodist Orphanage (now UMFS), and later as an adult, championing the children we serve today. Her early experiences shaped her deep commitment to giving back, building a network of friends and family who share this mission.

One of Barbara’s earliest memories is traveling by train with her mother, aunt, and two younger brothers from Lynchburg to Richmond in 1945 – bound for UMFS (then known as The Methodist Orphanage).

Barbara and her brothers, Ron and Reggie, lived in separate cottages on the large campus but often reunited in the dining hall (now Firefly Hall) for meals. “I was happy, but both brothers had some difficulty, so I was called regularly to spend some time with them.” Even at a young age, Barbara knew the profound importance of the relationship she shared with her brothers and the impact it would have in shaping who they became as adults.

Prior to living at UMFS, Barbara was not enrolled in school. She began

her education as a third grader at Albert Hill Elementary where a caring teacher dedicated her free time to mentoring Barbara and helping her catch up on her studies.

“She gave up a lot of her time at lunch and recess to work with me,” Barbara said. “It was a long, hard road for both of us.”

“Those were some of the happiest days because I had never known such kindness.”

Barbara has fond memories of UMFS staff who stepped up and into her life when her family couldn’t. UMFS Superintendent Pop Smith would take her and the other children singing to raise money for the orphanage.

“It was like Santa had come to live with us,” Barbara said. “Pop Smith would show up for breakfast on Saturday morning and had us singing. We started to sing in churches all over Virginia from September through Christmas trying to raise money for the Home.”

Pop Smith served as an influential figure for many of the children who lived on our campus. Today, his legacy lives on through the Pop Smith Scholarship which supports UMFS clients who are pursuing higher education or vocational trade.

During her time at UMFS, Barbara was also inspired by the generosity of the local community. “The men’s Bible class, which met on the campus monthly, helped take carloads of children around to churches to sing,” she remembers.

“People in the churches would let us stay with them for these nights. At times, I saw that we were better off than they were. I was also aware that they were sacrificing for us.” This early exposure to generosity deeply influenced Barbara, teaching her the value of giving back in whatever way you can.

After high school, Barbara went on to attend Ferrum College where she met her future husband, Alex, and together they joined Beulah Methodist Church in Chesterfield County.

Inspired by the kindness she received as a child, Barbara and Alex began volunteering to support and mentor the children at UMFS through Beulah UMC. This is also where Barbara formed a lasting friendship with Carolyn Wake.



Barbara
and Alex

Carolyn and Barbara are kindred spirits – both committed to giving back and making a difference in their community.



John and Carolyn

“Carolyn inspired me in so many ways,” Barbara said. “When I first met her, she talked about the different organizations she was supporting, and I told her about UMFS. She took no time to get involved, and I was always so inspired by her kindness and strength. The love she has for others is so clear, and she always wanted to do the most for others.”

Carolyn became an active volunteer with UMFS alongside Barbara. “I learned about Barbara’s story and was drawn to the mission,” Carolyn said. “So many of my fondest memories include Barbara because we had so much fun together volunteering and helping the children. She’s one of the kindest people I know, and I’m so lucky to have a friend like her.”

Supporting children and families was important to Carolyn and her husband, John. The Wakes welcomed UMFS children into their home during holidays, just as Barbara had experienced as a child years earlier.

Carolyn’s son, John Wake Jr., has fond memories of these holiday gatherings and continues his parents’ legacy of philanthropy, serving as a donor and volunteer at UMFS.

“My parents’ and the Sadler’s connection to UMFS is generational,” John said. “Our parents lead by example through volunteering, donating and spending time with the children, and we’ve followed in their footsteps.”

Barbara and Carolyn knew that they were making a difference for children and families at UMFS. What they didn’t realize was that they were creating a legacy of generosity within their own families.

Both Barbara and Carolyn’s husbands served as UMFS board members, as did Barbara’s son, Bruce, who took his father’s place on the board after his passing.

Barbara’s unwavering dedication to UMFS exemplifies a deep legacy of compassion and generosity that continues to inspire her family and community.

“My time at the home shaped me to who I am today, and I am forever grateful for the opportunities I was given,” Barbara said. “I’m honored to be able to continue supporting an organization that supported me so well.” ●

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