



WINDSOR
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Elizabeth Horton Sheff: Share Your Windsor Story

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Windsor High School, Windsor, CT

Interviewer: Sulema DePeyster
Interviewee: Elizabeth Horton Sheff
Transcriber: Sulema DePeyster
Edited by: Ciara Chagnon

Sulema DePeyster

So, you can go in any direction you please.

Elizabeth Horton Sheff

OK. So – tell us about your favorite teacher. OK. I'm squinting because I can see it but– all right, I'm ready.

Jenny Hawran

OK. So, we're rolling. Whenever you're ready.

Sulema DePeyster

OK. Do you mind introducing yourself?

Elizabeth Horton Sheff

Hello, my name is Elizabeth Horton Sheff and I am a Windsor resident of 11 years now. I moved to Windsor after my condo in Hartford burned down, actually to the ground. I lost everything, including my cat. But thank God no one was injured, and everyone got out of the 12 units safely and soundly. So, while I was in between homes, [00:01:00] I stayed at the Resident Inn here in Windsor from June to January of 2011. I looked for homes around the Hartford area and I found what I was looking for, or it found me, [smiles] here in Windsor, CT. One of the things that I want to express is a tribute to the neighbors who took me in my first year from going from city to suburbs, and that is the Oakes family – Louis, Maryann, and John. They are my neighbors. Unfortunately, Louis passed. But that first year here in Windsor, it was a real adjustment for me. [00:02:00] Coming from an urban center to a suburban center, I had to really actually get used to the silence. [laughs] And that was a real surprise for me.

Elizabeth Horton Sheff

It was really, really quiet, but the Oaks took me under their wings, and they helped me with things like showing me how to cut the grass, how to clean the gutters, what day the Windsor sanitation came around. And when we had that really bad storm, we were knocked out a week, I think, they helped me survive that week with no power. What I found Windsor to be is home. I love my home. I love Windsor. People are nice. They smile, they say hello, [00:03:00] they hold doors, they don't throw trash on the ground. These things are important to me. Quality of life is important to me, and Windsor is a town that will provide you with not only a sound structural life, but it's a community. So, when I walk down the street in Windsor or go to the store in Windsor, I feel comfortable, I feel safe, and I feel like a part of the community. So, I want to thank Windsor for taking a Hartford orphan in and letting me become a Windsor resident.

Sulema DePeyster

Thank you. And is there anything else that you'd like to share? Additional stories?

Elizabeth Horton Sheff

Oh OK, well, I am the mother of the named plaintiff in the historic civil rights lawsuit, Sheff vs. O'Neill. For those of [00:04:00] you who are unfamiliar, in 1989, we filed a suit calling into question the constitutional tenants of the disparity between urban and suburban education. We did eventually win the case through the Connecticut Supreme Court, and so the magnet schools you see in the Hartford County area, including AAE in Windsor, are a direct product of the civil rights action we took and that has been a long journey for us. It's still an active case, so we're still pursuing educational equity for all students in the state of Connecticut who wish to engage in a diverse educational experience. It's been a lot [00:05:00] of highs and a lot of lows, but over the years, I have met families and graduates of the public school system who have said to me: "I really appreciate what you did because my child was here and now, they're doing much better there."

Elizabeth Horton Sheff

I've had people say if it wasn't for me and the lawsuit, which it's not just me, by the way. There's a slew of public interest lawyers and community activists, parents, teachers, and students who are engaged in this action. But they say, "If it wasn't for you, I probably wouldn't have finished high school. I wouldn't be a college graduate." So, you know, the lows are taken up and erased by those moments in time when someone says to me, "Thank you." And I did it not for my son because I knew [00:06:00] Milo, who was then in the 10th grade, would not benefit. Basically, I didn't do it for my child. I did it for our children. So now Milo has a Milo who has a Milo, so it's three generations of my family that have been engaged and continue to be engaged in supporting the educational rights of our children. The constitutional rights of our children.

Sulema DePeyster

Thank you so much.

Elizabeth Horton Sheff

OK, you're welcome.