

BUILDING *Neighbor's Table* A PEOPLE GATHERER'S LOVE MISSION

By Brooke Zimny, OBU Director of Communications and Marketing

Sarah Harmeyer describes herself as “a vulnerable and kind of upside down kid” when she entered Ouachita in 1995. However, she may have had more clarity than most 18-year-olds – or even 80-year-olds – could hope for.

Sarah told her academic advisor that first year, “I don’t really know what I want to do, but this is what I do know – I just want to love people. I wish I could major in love.” It has been that intentional focus on loving people that has been a guiding force in Sarah’s life, especially as she launched Neighbor’s Table a few years ago.

Neighbor’s Table is less a business than it is a movement – a love mission. It started as a personal effort for Sarah to rest in her identity in Christ when she was overwhelmed with the busyness of life.

Sarah ended up majoring in health and physical education/recreation at Ouachita and held jobs in education and youth ministry before landing a fundraising job at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital. She still serves St. Jude/ALSAC as philanthropic advisor.

“I would work and work and work,” she said. “When you get out of college, it’s an easy thing to start finding your identity in the things that you do.”

As Sarah sought to reestablish her identity in Christ, she focused on being more than doing. She remembered a passion project, serving lunches out of her home as the “Red Porch Cafe” during grad school, as well as holding dinner parties for friends in Dallas, as highlights of her life.

“Something locked in my heart that felt like I was loving people. I got to prepare something for them,” Sarah said. “Something was happening then that made it feel like all boosters were firing, when I was doing the thing God made me to do.”

So Sarah asked her dad to build a farmhouse-style table with benches for her backyard – 20 seats under an oak tree with chandeliers above.

“I wanted to lean into the way God made me as a people gatherer,” she said.

And she set a goal to serve 500 people around her table that year, starting with a party for her neighborhood. It was a hit. Ninety-one neighbors came to that first dinner party.

“People just want to be invited,” Sarah said. “Just as God sets the table for us, prepares a place for us, I started to do that.

“That year, we had football parties, we had crawfish boils, we celebrated birthdays and new marriages and babies. I gathered neighbors between a funeral and a burial with just sandwiches. You know how down at the football field sometimes we’ll put red Solo cups in the chain link fence to spell things? I put Alicia that day. That’s our friend who had passed.

“It wasn’t elaborate. I’m not a chef. I cook as a means to create an experience for people to experience Jesus,” Sarah emphasized. “I don’t know about you but when we love Jesus, it kind of leaks out of us. It kind of spills out in our conversations. That’s what’s happening at my table.

“Martha Stewart has wrecked us a little because she makes everything look so perfect. I tell everyone: ‘This isn’t a perfect night. None of us are perfect either, so be yourself here tonight. I hope we’ll do more listening than talking.’”

Sarah hit her goal of serving 500 people that year. And the next. That’s when a friend invited her to think about looking beyond her own backyard to a larger purpose.

“I started thinking about being a leader and, as a people gatherer, what I could do with that. And then I remember that there are other people wired just like me,” Sarah said. “There are other people gatherers in the world. What if I could cheer them on to gather their community and love their neighbors? What if people just need a table like I did to call home base?”

So that’s what she did. Sarah and her dad build and deliver custom tables around the nation and help people host their own Neighbor’s Table experience. She has built a community through social media, cheering others on in her role as chief people gatherer.

“God is moving in people’s hearts to love their neighbors, to love their neighborhoods, to love their communities. There are so many moments like that that I’m reminded, as believers, how loved we are and how much love we have to offer,” Sarah said. “Life gets really exciting when we get intentional about things that matter.

“Life might seem crazy for you right now. But life is meant to be spent together. And we’ve got to start doing that together. If you find yourself in an office, I want you to think about yourself as an ambassador. I want you to think, as you go and get married, as you start a family – or don’t, like me: What will you do with this one life?”

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JOIN THE NEIGHBOR'S TABLE MOVEMENT

As Sarah builds a Neighbor’s Table family that is on a love mission together, her goal is to have tables in all 50 states by 2020. Sarah’s dad makes hand-crafted tables in their family barn in Texas, and Sarah personally delivers the tables all over the country. She also helps those clients host their first Neighbor’s Table experience. To order a table or receive more details, email [Hello@NeighborsTable.com](mailto>Hello@NeighborsTable.com).



Follow along with the @NeighborsTable love mission on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and connect on NeighborsTable.com.



NEIGHBOR'S TABLE
—a love mission—

Sarah shared her story with Ouachita students during the Homecoming chapel this fall. Watch the full speech at vimeo.com/obu/table.