

Transcription

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Narrator: Father Edward Joseph Flanagan, born in Ireland, settled in Nebraska, and ultimately recognized throughout the world. He was not afraid to challenge convention, the courts, and society itself, advocating for disadvantaged youth that seemingly had no value. Father Edward Flanagan passed away unexpectedly on May 15th, 1948. He was 62 years old. Father Flanagan founded and fought for Boys Town, and in doing so, forever changed the way America cares for its children. Father Flanagan's work in Omaha started with a hotel for homeless men.

Father Flanagan: I had a large hotel there where I tried to take care of unfortunate men. And I would try to feed them and clothe them and find a job for them.

Man: As he talked to these men, they convinced him that he'd started too late. They said, "Father, give up on me. You shoulda talked to me when I was 12. You shoulda talked to me when I was 14. You could've helped me then. Where were you when I was 16?" And so that really formed the basis, scientifically, of his intervention with kids.

Narrator: With permission from his bishop and a borrowed \$90, on December 12, 1917, Father Flanagan opened his first home and welcomed his first boys. The home filled quickly and a larger home was needed. As the home grew with boys, Father Flanagan began to think bigger.

Father Flanagan: Lovely country, isn't it?

Dave: Uh-huh.

Father Flanagan: Over 200 acres here of rich, fine soil. Really live and breathe out here.

Dave: What about it?

Father Flanagan: I wanna buy it. Now look, Dave, I can get it cheap. Just look at it, Dave. We could build a real town for the boys here. They could have gardens, dormitories, gymnasiums, classrooms...

Dave: Mortgages, and bills, and debts. Be reasonable, first you started with 5 boys, then there was 20, then there was 50. With this place, you'd be looking for 100 boys.

Father Flanagan: Five hundred.

Dave: All right, 500. What? How you gonna get the money? How you gonna do it? It's crazy.

Man: Father Flanagan's dream, by 1920, was to expand Boys Town. He purchased Overlook Farm at 144th and Dodge for \$250,000. The mortgage Father Flanagan took out to purchase Overlook Farm was a great burden to him for many many years, especially when The Great Depression hit.

Narrator: In 1921, Father Flanagan moved the boys to Overlook Farm. Father couldn't afford to rent 2 trucks, so the younger boys rode in the truck, while the older boys walked the 11 miles to their new home. Once at Overlook Farm, there were buildings to be built, and Boys Town was not only up and running, but on the air.

Man 2: Hello everyone, again we bring you a cheery welcome to Boys Town, a famous city of little men as we open another program of words and music, brought to you directly from this unique community, just 11 miles west of Omaha, Nebraska.

Singing: Boys Town will shine today. [inaudible 00:04:08] we will fight, fight, fight, fight for Boys Town.

Narrator: And still, the boys kept coming.

Man 3: I remember meeting Father Flanagan for the first time. I was 12 years old when I came to Boys Town in 1935. He put his arm around my shoulder and welcomed me to Boys Town. He had just had a feeling of longing and also had a feeling of somebody caring.

Man 4: Father Flanagan, I don't think you could have found a greater man, really. He was a fair man and he really loves children, and he has...he was a man of strong discipline.

Man 5: When I came to Boys Town, I found it a magic place. I know kids... I had never met a black kid, never met a Mexican, never met a Jewish boy, and we are all friends and we worked together, played together, fought together. And it was just a...it was a melting pot, really. And Father Flanagan taught us very, very carefully, differences are not divisive, they are enriching.

Father Flanagan: We have great opportunities in this country, and so we

must find a reason, to find a cause for this delinquency.

Man: Father Flanagan's mission was to change the way children were treated across America, because at that time with eugenics in place, children were being discriminated against due to their race or religion and there's no therapeutic program for those boys and girls. So he wanted to create a model of a program that could be duplicated across America, and that's what he did in the village of Boys Town.

Narrator: With the stock market crash in 1929, followed by drought and the Dust Bowl, the country was in grave circumstances. And at Boys Town, the mortgage Father Flanagan had taken to purchase Overlook Farm and many of the buildings became a great burden.

Man: In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl years hit Boys Town. Overlook Farm, which Father Flanagan loved, provided all the food for the boys.

Man 6: I remember about 1938, I think, we had quite a famine here. Boys Town was really up against it, the food was very scarce. I remember going down for supper and the only thing we had on the table was eggplant and milk.

Man: It didn't rain for three summers, so they ran out of food and the boys were hungry. And they had no money, no food, and it was a very desperate time. Luckily, Father had some good supporters and donors that would donate funds and some food to keep going, but Boys Town barely survived the Great Depression.

Narrator: Even the boys' bucket brigade could not save the crops. And with no money, and no food, it was a very desperate time. And even then, the boys kept coming.

Man 7: I love the story, really, of how I came to Boys Town. And I had to drop out of school because I didn't have the proper clothes to wear. I was collecting old newspapers in an effort to sell them and make some money. And on the street of Kansas City one day, this paper fell open to an article about Boys Town. I told my aunt and showed it to her. And I says, "I want very much to go there. Maybe if I go there, I'll be able to go back to school." She managed to borrow and scrounge up enough money for my bus fare to Omaha. I got to Omaha, to the bus station, and so at the bus station I went up to the counter and I asked the person behind the counter, I says, "How do I get [inaudible 00:07:56] boy's

home?" So I started out walking along West Dodge. I began walking and I arrived at Boys Town. I saw nobody. And I saw no one, but I heard something behind the building, so I walked behind the building and the boys were all lined up beginning to say their night prayers. And some young man approached me. He saw me standing to the side and he approached me, he was a young boy himself, and he said to me, "Welcome to Boys Town". And that was the beginning of my time at Boys Town.

Bud: Okay, take it, Scoop.

Scoop: Thanks, Bud, and good afternoon, America. [inaudible 00:08:45], movie cameras are scheduled to start grinding Monday. A crew of 30 cameramen, technicians, and so forth, arrived here today to make final preparations to start filming the picture, which starts Spencer Tracey and Mickey Rooney. The film company's expected to on location at Boys Town for the next month.

Man 8: Boys Town is real. It is a drama greater than the imagination of Hollywood's best storytellers. Four thousand boys have passed through this city of little men. And now, the drama, the laughter, the heartache, and the triumph of all these boys is crystallized in the story of one young renegade who came from the back streets into conflict with the one man who could save him. Once in a generation comes a picture with a heartwarming sympathy, the understanding of Boys Town.

Man: The movie "Boys Town" was premiered in Downtown Omaha, and Father Flanagan went to MGM Studios and asked special permission to have it premiered in the city. And when it was given, the whole city of Omaha just basically went crazy.

Father Flanagan: Does the premiere here at Omaha compare favorably with those being held every day, almost, in Hollywood?

Mickey: Well this surpasses anything that's ever been done in Hollywood.

Father Flanagan: All right, thank you very much Mickey Rooney, pleasure to have you up here.

Narrator: The power of Father Flanagan's presence was not only the stuff of movies, but also real life.

Man 9: My father passed away 1938. He was 34 years old. Beings [SP] we were sharecroppers, we had to leave the farm. So it was decided that two of us would go to Boys Town. So we left early in the morning and my brother and I were following one wheat field, one wheat field, pretty soon we were in the corn country. And I look at him and I says, "My God, we'll never find our way back to Kansas." We arrived at Boys Town, and the first person that we met was Father Flanagan. He came in, welcomed us. And just his presence, I just...all the way up here I was so depressed and...but the minute he walked in the room, he says, "We're gonna take care of you. We're gonna see that you have a good education and we're gonna teach you skills so that you can be good people in your community when you leave here." So that was a great consolation to know that Father Flanagan was there for our benefit.

Narrator: Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into World War II. And by it's end, more than 800 Boys Town citizens would serve nearly every theater of the war. Many gave their lives. Each life remembered by Father Flanagan. In the "Boys Town Times", he ran stories about each boy who had passed away.

James: At the present time, I am in Italy, not far from the enemy lines. I have been wounded once, which was a minor wound, and received a purple heart award medal. If I get a chance, Father, I'll send it to you to keep for me until I get back to the states.

Narrator: Four days later, James Burns was killed in action.

Father Flanagan: Our records show that our boys have died in the Pacific. Undoubtedly, some of the are in [inaudible 00:12:57]. And one of our boys was in the march of death from the town, his name was Paradise [SP].

Man: When World War II broke out, many young men went up to sign up for the military and a majority of the boys who had come to Boys Town were orphans, at that time, had no family members. And one boy, in particular, went to a recruitment office and they said, "You can't join the military because you have no next of kin," because everyone had a list of next of kin. And he said, "Put down Father Flanagan, he's the one that turned me into a man and the only person that ever loved and cared for me." So eventually, Father Flanagan became what they called "America's No. 1 War Dad" because hundreds of former boys listed him as their only next of kin, and he was very proud of that honor.

Narrator: The war also created a new generation of displaced children, and while on the mission to Europe to help, Father Flanagan died of a massive heart attack. His passing was a national event with a story in "Life" magazine. And his funeral mass broadcast live over the radio.

Man 10: By the end of his life, Father Flanagan was a famous figure in America. He had a major blockbuster Hollywood film made a made about him he was asked by presidents to go first to Asia and then to Germany after the war to oversee the effort there with the orphans after the war. Despite all of that fame, he saw very clearly that if he was going to build an organization, a home for children that also was about structural change, it had to continue after he died. So the famous quote by Father Flanagan is, "The work will continue, you see, because it is God's work and not mine."

Man: In 1948, when senior Wagner became the director of Boys Town, he was successor to Father Flanagan, and he had the shock of his life when he took over Boys Town, because at that time, the home was over \$15 million in debt. Father Flanagan had begun a major building expansion program, took out numerous mortgages to pay for it, and now it was up to Father Wagner to pay off these mortgages or look at selling property and shutting down a part of the program.

Wagner: And we'd like to say the next 50 years I reckon is even gonna be better than the past 50 years. We would only take in, say, 200, 300 new boys every year of the 2,000, 3,000 applications that we get. Whether we'd be able to start other places, God only knows, but I have in my own mind, this idea that sometime in the not too distant future, we have a place...we may have a place or two where another Boys Town is started, we work in the same [inaudible 00:15:44] as we do here.

Narrator: But to achieve the expansion, Monsignor Wagner would need to get Boys Town on solid financial footing. His solution to the debt crisis was to raise money through direct to mail campaigns, and in doing so, keep Boys Town open for many years to come. Little did he know that this would one day allow Boys Town to expand across the nation.

Neil: [inaudible 00:16:10] here, the eagle has landed. That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

Narrator: In 1969, humanity reached new heights. But here at home, the world was evolving in new ominous ways, and it became clear that Boys Town needed to evolve, too. A new population of boys were arriving at

Boys Town. Monsignor Robert Hut [SP] called them social orphans.

Robert: Okay, [inaudible 00:16:47] drugs in the early '60s, student rebellion, parental rejection, and the general erosion of family life. The traditional type of care that had served the home so well for so many years needed to yield to a more personalized approach. With all these things in mind, we set out to develop a family concept that Father Flanagan himself had dreamed about long ago.

Man: When Monsignor Robert Hut became director of Boys Town in 1973, he had received reports that the home was on the verge of closing, which it was. Our youth care program was obsolete, it had to be modified and updated. And no one knew what to do. And he stepped forward, began the Family Home Program that we have today in the village of Boys Town, and saved Boys Town from closing, and began many new other programs to modernize the concept of Boys Town and especially with the treatment of boys and girls.

Narrator: By late 1974, Boys Town had hired its first family teachers and built new family style homes on campus. But that was just the beginning of some major changes. Girls. Not long after the Family Home Program arrived on campus, so did the first few girls. It was 1979 and, while it may have seemed like an experiment to some, it was a vital step forward in Boys Town's mission to change the way America cares for kids and families. And the Boys Town model tested, researched, and modified, continues to transform the lives of thousands boys and girls today.

Man 11: Those children are the primary change agents. And this model is built around that as an assumption, but it's operationalized that way. These kids don't know they're in a treatment program. They literally don't. They think they're living in a family.

Man 12: They turn on campus that we can do this together, we work together, we are a team, we are a family. That's the idea of commitment, is being able to become a part of that "we" instead of "I".

Man 13: You know, when our kids leave here, the thing we're hoping for is that they have a nice, average life, because right now at risk kids are not destined to have an average life, they're destined to have a very poor, a very, very tragic life. And so we wanna change that trajectory and we want 'em to get 'em to be married, and go to church, and have jobs, and vote, and take care of their yards, and have dogs and cats.

That's what we want. That, to us, is the ultimate success factor for our kids, is when we see them engage like any other family.

Narrator: And how does Boys Town know their programs work?

Man 14: It's the most researched model in the world. We have a longitudinal study of over 20 years for our campus kids, which tells us that our kids are good citizens. Our model works because we know it from a quantitative standpoint and a qualitative standpoint.

Man 15: The research is what gave us some of our other programs: Common Sense parenting, In-Home Family Services, Care Coordination, all of those programs we built with a research effort, as well as a practice ever effort. We're very unique in that fashion. Universities research ideas, we research solutions.

Woman: You know, there's days when you go home and you just can't believe what you've just dealt with, you can't believe what you've just seen. And it's difficult when the you have have exhausted all of your resources and that family has still chosen drugs or alcohol over their children.

Diana: The guys came out of the bathroom and they were like, "Diana, clean that up." And I looked and there was just blood everywhere and he was dead. And so I just was in shock. I mean I'd never... I gotta stop for a minute.

Man 16: Moving from home to home, sexually abused, not fitting in, there was just a lot that I think any child could go through that would take their minds off of, you know, the important things.

Man 17: The toughest thing about looking seriously at the problems facing the American kids and American families, especially the most troubled ones, is that they seem on the surface to be intractable, but if you break it into pieces and say, "I'm gonna start working on this piece of that problem and make a change, then this piece," and you put together the data, the scientific data, I think you can make a case that it can be changed. But you still follow a research-proven model and if you can prove 83% and 94% success rates working with kids and families, you can begin to have the building blocks of a new society, and a stronger one for kids and families.

Man: To build a new society, Boys Town realized that reaching more

youth meant expanding locations across the country and expanding programs as well.

Man 18: Boys Town Hotline is really one of the our best programs, and we reach out to over 150,000 people every year. Last year that hotline interrupted 600 suicides in progress, over 600.

Woman 2: So our research team got together and developers got together and we developed the Common Sense Parenting Program.

Woman 3: Welcome to Common Sense Parenting class, and today we're going to talk about preventive teaching.

Woman 2: Well the number one benefit that parents say to us, is that it gives them a step-by-step approach to being able to discipline their children in a positive way. So it's an excellent program for really giving parents the tools, the parenting tools they need for everyday life.

Man 19: So we help the families through...it's called In-Home Family Services. We call them preventive services in New York. We teach the parents how to parent their children, how to give consequences, how to, you know, how to be able to teach themselves. Because if we were to just teach the child, as soon as we remove ourselves, nothing's gonna change. We need that environment to change and we need the parent to be able to take the role that they should have as a parent.

Man 20: The teaching model of Boys Town is very dependent upon a youth's ability to communicate, both to hear, to speak, to use language, to receive feedback and receive it positively, all of those things necessary, communication is required.

Man 21: And because communication is key in helping children and families overcome their challenges, Boys Town begin to focus on research to address communication disorders in children. As a result, The Boys Town National Research Hospital was built to help close the circle of care, to address every aspect of a child's development.

Man 22: When she first heard her first sound, we were so happy we didn't even cry, if that makes sense.

Woman 4: And our ultimate goal is to get her to spoken language.

Man 23: Be able to provide enough hearing for the child to development

speech and hearing, I mean, that's a miracle.

Woman 5: My dream come true. And that's because of them.

Man 23: The next frontier for us at the hospital, it is that neurobehavioral, so there is now technology that allows us to better understand functioning of the brain, not just the observation of behavior of a youth, but the actual biological basis for that behavior.

Man 24: It'll be groundbreaking in the United States. It'll change the way every kid in America and probably every kid in the world is treated for mental illness in the next 5 to 10 years.

Man 25: This is the only place in the world where everybody in this village, I mean everybody who lives here, is not only dedicated to your goodness, your happiness, but knows how to help you achieve it.

Woman 6: The day that I found out I was coming for sure, there was a really big thunderstorm and windstorm in Iowa, and I had made the comment, "With any luck, this wind'll blow down Boys Town and I won't have to go."

Man 26: For that first two years, it was, "Okay, if I can just convince my mom I'm ready to come home." But after the...at that two-year mark, it was, "I don't wanna go home."

Narrator: Now 100 years since founding Boys Town, and more than 50 years after his death, Father Flanagan's legacy continues to live, not only in the programs and services of Boys Town, but also in the legacy of changed lives.

Man 27: I mean, it's done a lot for me all through my whole life, it's helped me. I don't know where I'd be today if it wasn't for it.

Man 28: Kids that I encounter now after they come back, after three, four years they come back, stop at the clinic, "Do you remember me?" "Yeah, you were a smart aleck, you didn't think much of this place." "Yeah, well it sure means a lot to me now.

Man 29: Boys Town gave me, like, you know, opportunity. They gave me hope.

Woman 6: It's a different type of an approach. It's like they give you a

family. So it's just a...it's a completely different life experience.

Man 30: Because what Boys Town does is they invest in you. You just gotta be willing to take the investment and run with it.

Father Flanagan: The most abandoned child, the most insignificant child in all the world is much more precious than most costly dollar [SP]. In fact, all the diamonds in all the world, all of the wealth in all the world, could not buy a human soul.