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Sheila Long: Hello, everybody. Welcome to the Head of the Table podcast. My name's Sheila Long and I will be your host for today's show.

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Sheila Long: Today we have a great guest on, Anjum Alden, and she has been a friend of mine in Shorewood, Wisconsin for many, many years. I met her after I was laid off from my position, it was like a mutually agreed upon layoff after my first baby was born and I met Anjum because she also had kids who are a little older and she kind of helped me navigate through the ropes of not working in corporate America anymore.

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Sheila Long: And so she's always been a little step ahead of me along the way. So when I began -- then I had the idea for this business, MalamaDoe, which is -- The Head of the Table promotes MalamaDoe members, Anjum built our website, I hired her, she had this great business and she still has it building websites. So she built that for us.

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Sheila Long: And then along the way, she's done all these other awesome things and she's always interested in using her technical skills to help build MalamaDoe. So she kind of comes in and out to help me on different consulting projects. So Anjum, sorry I've been talking so much, welcome.

Anjum Alden: Thank you, Sheila.

Sheila Long: So glad you're here. Glad to have you on the show. So I hear a lot about this community endeavor that you're involved in, the Buy Nothing Shorewood, can you tell me a little bit about that?

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Anjum Alden: Yeah. Buy Nothing was started by my -- well, let me backtrack a little bit. Buy Nothing is an international movement now, it was started in Shorewood about five years ago by my friend Rachel Baum, she started a Shorewood chapter and the goal of it is to operate as a gift economy where you gift things to people and ask people for what you need with no money exchanged and no trades, nothing.

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Anjum Alden: You just ask for what you need or you gift whatever you don't need anymore, it can be anything from food to items in your house, you're decluttering, that kind of stuff. So Rachel had asked if I wanted to help her manage the Facebook group for it and I started that -- I mean I started doing that with her five years ago.

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Anjum Alden: And the group kind of evolved into being this community help kind of thing where we learned of a family that needed help and we all pitched together to help them and we started offering free Thanksgiving meals to four or five families in the area that needed them. So I got it into my head that -- I guess I started to realize that Shorewood is a very generous and giving community.

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Anjum Alden: I would just come into other situations where I would find out about a child who maybe was not getting enough food at home because of some difficult situation going on in their home environment or I would find out about a woman who had been in an abusive situation and had left but had no resources to start her own life and I would get frustrated because I would realize that there were all these people who wanted to help but there was no way that I could get them to help.

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Anjum Alden: So eventually, through my work in Buy Nothing and learning more about the community and also learning more about problems in the community, I started another thing late last year called the Shorewood Care Network. So the Shorewood Care Network is -- it's volunteer based, it's basically a network of volunteers and it's geared towards people who are going through some kind of a short-term emergency or problem and they just need help from neighbors.

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Anjum Alden: Simple things like taking out their garbage or giving them meals for a week through meal train or mowing or shoveling their properties or grocery shopping for them. So the Shorewood Care Network started out with about 30 volunteers and it was also -- we also wanted to really reach out to seniors in the area who might be living alone and just don't have anyone to call on for things that they need.

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Anjum Alden: And I started that -- I found another woman who was really interested in starting it with me, Amy Tasse, and then we found seven other people to help

with us, I believe eight of us that are kind of like a committee when we have to make big decisions, we make them together as a committee.

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Anjum Alden: So that's how Care Network started.

Sheila Long: That is just so kind and so generous, so generous of your time and just caring for others and really making their lives more dignified, right? So thanks for doing that.

Anjum Alden: Right, and then can just be -- thank you. It can just be a short-term thing but it makes such a difference.

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Anjum Alden: I feel like as we get older, we all start to realize that one day we can wake up in the morning and our lives are a certain way and we go to sleep that night and everything has changed because of something really difficult or awful that has happened like a sudden death or you find out that you have cancer or someone close to you have been given a difficult medical diagnosis and it came into being to help in those situations where you're completely unable to really perform your day to day things you need to do to keep yourself going.

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Anjum Alden: And you just need help and you don't have family nearby or maybe you do not belong to a religious institution that can help you, you just need short term help, just -- with no strings attached, just based on kindness and compassion from your neighbors.

Sheila Long: What a wonderful thing. Thank you so much for doing that.

Anjum Alden: Sure.

Sheila Long: Our last guest was just talking about that, that was something that she learned from her mom, was just to be selfless and just -- there really just were just no strings attached, just to be -- just like a kind, caring individual.

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Sheila Long: And just having empathy and understanding what's going on with your neighbor might be something that might happen to you soon too.

Anjum Alden: Right, exactly.

Sheila Long: So with this, how has your business moved or changed especially with COVID-19, have you had to do anything differently?

Anjum Alden: Yeah, definitely. So the minute we found out that we were going to have to -- Shorewood was closing down its school, along with so many other -- with all the North Shore communities, we decided to change the scope a little bit of the Care Network to basically help people who are stuck at home during the quarantine period.

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Anjum Alden: We also grew -- we promoted it in Facebook and we grew from the 30 volunteers we had started with late last year to now 150 volunteers and we literally...

Sheila Long: Amazing.

Anjum Alden: ...got to that many in two weeks, just went from 30 to 150.

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Anjum Alden: So we were helping with all kinds of things as people stuck at home, they cannot leave because they might have come back from a country where they have to go into self-quarantine for two weeks, we have seniors who have problems with their immunity, underlying health issues, so they do not want to leave their house and they should not be leaving their house, they needed help with grocery shopping or they just needed someone to check in with them by phone and make sure they're doing okay.

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Anjum Alden: So we -- our focus right now is really on helping people who are at home during the quarantine and then once the quarantine period ends, we'll probably go back to what we were doing before, which was just helping people with the a short-term emergency or need.

Sheila Long: Wow, that is just great. So how did you go from 30 to 150 volunteers, did you do any type of advertising?

Anjum Alden: We just...

Sheila Long: I think I've seen -- I've gotten a few -- emails that I've gotten.

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Anjum Alden: Right, we just did an interest form, it was just a simple Google online form and it just -- we promoted it on numerous community groups in Facebook and it just asks people for their contact information and then what they're interested in helping with, it has a checklist of do you want to call a resident to check in on them, do you want to do grocery shopping, do you want to help

with a grocery store gift certificate, they can choose whatever their interest is and then submit that form.

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Anjum Alden: And then that just -- those responses get collected and then I email people when a need arises to see who is available. So I might send out an email to 50 volunteers out of which I want to say like 5 or 10 will respond and say they can help and I'll pick typically the first one that responds and that's kind of how it's been working and -- kind of trying to figure out a good process.

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Anjum Alden: So I'm working through it right now to see how I can make the process more efficient. So far, it's been pretty manageable. If it starts to get crazy busy, then I'll have to rethink how I'm doing it.

Sheila Long: Okay, well, that sounds great. Thank you for doing that. How can people find out about -- is that a Facebook page?

Anjum Alden: It's promoted on the Shorewood Community Network which is a group that I - I'm one of the administrators of, it's also promoted on Buy Nothing Shorewood and on other Shorewood groups like Shorewood based community groups.

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Anjum Alden: We keep promoting it and they're both calling us with a need and then also if you want to volunteer with the network, we keep trying to put those out every few weeks to make sure people know that we're here and then also if you want to help because people -- this is such a difficult time, people feel helpless and they really do want to help as you can tell from the volunteers that signed up so quickly.

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Sheila Long: Okay, wow. Well, thank you. It just makes the world so much smaller, just knowing people like you are out there helping and caring about everyone.

Anjum Alden: Yeah, and it's just -- it's so humbling, you know? Someone called us and asked if we could grocery shop for them and I said of course and they just started crying, they were so relieved because they had nobody else to call and they were just so scared because there's an underlying health issue, it makes it actually really dangerous for them to be in an environment where there's this kind of a virus, they have an underlying respiratory problem.

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Anjum Alden: So that's happened a few times now, that someone has called us and we were like, "Of course we will help you," and they literally just start crying, it is such a relief to them and it's just -- people want to help. So all I'm trying to do is facilitate the help.

Sheila Long: Okay. Well, thank you.

Anjum Alden: You're very welcome.

Sheila Long: We have that at MalamaDoe too where people move here and they don't know anybody and they might've had a big career.

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Sheila Long: Like they have great backgrounds and then they move here and they don't know anybody, so it's just nice to be able to take the resources you have and just be able to help them move forward. It might just be something really small like connecting two people with a similar interest or just buying them some milk or something when they just -- when it's spilled, you know?

Anjum Alden: Exactly. And that's kind of our goal, is to facilitate connections.

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Anjum Alden: So maybe you have a neighbor next door to you you don't even know and if we can facilitate that neighbor helping you and you helping that neighbor, then that's a great thing because that will continue long after we have offered the help that we're offering.

Sheila Long: Yeah. And it just makes it a nice place to live.

Anjum Alden: Exactly.

Sheila Long: So thanks for doing that for Shorewood and just for other people listening who aren't in our neighborhood, just -- it's a great thing to start and Anjum is such a great example for everybody.

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Sheila Long: Just if you have some downtime or you're between jobs, there's always someone out there that you can help.

Anjum Alden: Exactly.

Sheila Long: So is there anything you wished you would've known when you started out? I know you like to have your hands -- you like to do lots of different things, right? You don't want to fit in to one type of mold?

Anjum Alden: Yeah, I guess.

Sheila Long: Anything you wish you would've known or you just like constant change?

Anjum Alden: I do. I do like change. And I find that I can't do any one thing full time.

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Anjum Alden: I really like to have four or five different projects going on at the same time, that's when I'm the happiest and I just feel like I can use all my skills in different ways. So there's nothing that I wish I had known, it's more like I'm just so glad that so many people stepped up to help, it's just -- I've always thought this community was amazing and I just -- it makes me cry when so many people step up and say we want to help you, it's just the best feeling in the world.

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Sheila Long: Aww, thank you for -- wow, that is just awesome. All right, so Mother's Day. Mother's Day is coming up round the corner, we're trying -- I know COVID-19 has completely transformed everyone's world but we still need to celebrate our moms and do you have an example of something from your past that can inspire us, like a story about your mom?

Anjum Alden: Yeah, my mom -- my parents...

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Anjum Alden: I grew up in Pakistan, so my parents are Pakistani and Pakistan is a pretty male-dominated society but my mom was very fiercely independent and really wanted to kind of carve out her own future, so she went to medical school, had to convince her dad that there's value in sending a woman to medical school and she became the first doctor in her community.

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Anjum Alden: So we grew up with this really smart, independent woman who just very insightful, completely could think out of the box and I guess while I'm taking to you I'm realizing this, she also liked to do different things. So she was a doctor but she was part time while we were growing up and then she could just do anything. She could look at somebody's sweater and figure out how to knit it just by looking at it, she would sew us dresses. She could -- she would fix things in the house, my dad wasn't really what great at being a -- the handyperson in the house.

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Anjum Alden: So she was the one who did that. So she was just an amazing role model for being a strong, determined and ambitious woman and I think me and my other two sisters really take a lot out -- what we do today, her -- a lot of

examples from her, a lot of motivation from how she brought us up and how she was with us, so...

Sheila Long: That is such a great story, you know?

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Sheila Long: Such a great role model that you had growing up.

Anjum Alden: Yeah, definitely.

Sheila Long: Can't believe she was handy, you know? And she's a doctor and sewed. Those are three things that seem to be different personality types but maybe not, I don't know. Maybe I'm sounding old fashioned or something, I don't know.

Anjum Alden: Yeah, no, she just had a very versatile set of skills. She still does, she still...

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Anjum Alden: She's in her early 80s now and she's still -- she's able to navigate Facebook and she's always learning new things and trying to keep herself relevant even in a society that doesn't necessarily encourage that. Like when you get to a certain age, there's just very few things to do and my mom is always challenging that and saying, "Well, just because I'm old doesn't mean I've stopped learning, I've stopped growing," so...

Sheila Long: Yeah, I think that's one of the interesting things about COVID-19.

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Sheila Long: Just we're all trying to protect the most vulnerable which tends to be the elderly and they're like, "Why are you protecting us?" Well, we care about you but they're like, "We've made it this far." I don't know.

Anjum Alden: Well, and they've been through so many hardships that we never had to go through. They've -- so many of them have been through World War II, the depression, all these things that we've been really fortunate and privileged to not have to experience. So they're more hardy than we give them credit for.

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Sheila Long: Okay. All right, well, thanks for sharing that story about your mom.

Anjum Alden: Sure.

Sheila Long: I think now I know where you get it from, where you're always caring about other people but you're thinking of the latest things, just -- Anjum tells me, "Give me that really difficult problem you have with technology at your work."

Okay, there are quite a few, where can I start? We have to do podcasts and we need to be safer at home.

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Sheila Long: That would be -- but actually EDGE Marketing & Media are an awesome podcast firm, they figured that all out, so that was really wonderful and we thank them for doing this.

Anjum Alden: Absolutely.

Sheila Long: All right, well, do you want people to reach out to you on social media? Is there any place where they can find you? I know you mentioned the Shorewood Care Network.

Anjum Alden: Yeah, so we have an email address and it's just shorewoodcarenetwork@gmail.com.

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Anjum Alden: If anyone's interested in finding out more or volunteering with us or has a need that -- all the needs that people reach out to us with are always private, we do not broadcast them, we are very careful about sharing private information. So yeah, that's how you can reach out, through shorewoodcarenetwork@gmail.com.

Sheila Long: Okay. All right, well, thanks a lot for being on the show and for being a constant supporter of everything...

Anjum Alden: You're very welcome, Sheila.

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Sheila Long: No problem. I talk to Anjum every day, we -- there's always something new, you know? Before the pandemic but, yeah. So thanks a lot and thanks to all of our listeners, we are so happy you're listening to the stories of the great women that are starting businesses or helping businesses and helping us just increase the visibility of the businesses that they're running so that we can have more women seated at the heads of tables in business and in life as well.

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Sheila Long: So thanks to everyone for tuning in. Thanks to everybody for listening to the Head of the Table podcast. Please feel free to look for us wherever you find your podcasts, let your friends know as well. Thanks, everyone.

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