

if you could only hear me

I have been standing here for seventy years, witnessing the city streets change from hosting horses and carriages to transform into the pathways to the cars, looking at people walk back and forth to markets, theaters and schools.

It was a cloudy day, the sunlight seeping through the clouds was protecting six men from the Arizona sun.

- "Over here" shouted a man,
- "No, the plan says here", said another worker.
- "This light pole is meant for the corner on Main St and McDonald St", said a man taking charge.

With that said they installed me, I am the light pole that has witnessed Mesa transform.

- "We need our store right here", said a pale young woman.
- "The light pole gives us great light", her spouse continued. And the couple made the decision to buy the property.

I thought their decision would be as hard as when those six men put me down. I remembered when in 1950, Mesa's population was 16,790 people and when Mesa Community College opened in 1965. I wish people could hear the many stories I can tell about our history, our community and our culture. It was around that time that I remember one day hearing a car in the distance, the noise was so loud as when I was put in the ground.

- "Aaaaaaahhhhh, help me", a strange voice said.

A Humongous word was yelling from the flat bed of a truck with the spelling the name of the young couple's store "Stapley Store".

- Why are you screaming?", I asked, forgetting for a second that nobody could hear me. To my surprise, the sign answered me.
- You can hear me? Can you tell me what's going on around this city?, It's kind of scary", expressed the sign.
- "Yeah of course", I say enthusiastically, ready to give a history lesson. Welcome to Downtown Mesa. I have been here since the 30s together with that street clock. He used to make very busy people aware of the time. But one of the first ones in the block was the Nile, the first movie theater in the city. In 1937 two important events brought people and life to downtown: Mesa City Hall opened and so did Irving School, just around the corner from here. They filled the sidewalks with children and public servants. I was brought here forty years after the Sirrine house, but I remember people talking about the home and more importantly the family living there.

Without realizing how my brief history lesson entertained us both, the men working on the sign were done erecting "Stapley".

- "Turn it on", a worker instructed.

Suddenly, the most beautiful sign, lit with different colors brightened the sky, and downtown. And it brought me fifty years of company, stories and friendship. We witnessed kids learning to walk, couples expressing their love, youth going for a walk with their grandparents, and the downtown being transformed without realizing we were writing our own story. As more neon signs came to Main St, the newbies used to love "Stapley"'s story. I would start

- "In Mesa there are many neon signs like you. You were created and brought here to tell the costumers from far away that a store or motel is right there. At night the drivers can read your names because you get light up".

One day, after sharing so many experiences together something unexpected happened.

- "Do you really think that we should give the neon sign away?"
- "Of course, it's getting old and it would cost too much to repair it"

Stapley was afraid, not knowing what her destiny would be. My heart was broken, how to say goodbye to a friend that has been with me for so long? Was in that moment, that I remembered one of my favorite visitors, a young couple from Argentina that moved to the US and made Mesa their home. They were walking holding hands, discussing a book from Richard Bach. I took a deep breath trying to collect as much courage to say goodbye to my friend by giving her hope for the future and I repeated that quote I liked so much.

"Don't be dismayed at good-byes. A farewell is necessary before you can meet again. And meeting again, after moments or lifetimes, is certain for those who are friends."

We looked at each other hoping for the day that we see each other again.