

JEFFREY

Most of my life I've been staying with family, and something happened where a member of the family had to end up being taken care of better than I could do it. I couldn't keep up with the rent on the place we were staying at by myself. So, I ended up over at City Union Mission and stayed there for some time and then ended up camping at various locations for a little bit.

It was about a year for each stage. Then I met Carol who worked here for a while, and she let me know that the campsite that I was going to be at was going to be swept away, potentially. I asked her, "Hey, is there a way you could help me out with that?" And she invited me to come here and I ended up staying here for a year.

Now I have my own place. It's an apartment building. There's eight apartments in it. The first day I was there, I ended up meeting one of the neighbors, and we hit it off. We spent time on the patio smoking because I smoke cigars and he smokes cigarettes. We spend time, mostly him but I contribute, most of the time talking about the neighborhood or things that have happened. I've been there for about two weeks.

When I was homeless, I met some friends that were also homeless, and we keep in touch with each other. There's one gal I know who's still homeless that I try to meet up with every once in a while to see how she's doing. And we talk about random things going on in the neighborhood and so on and so forth. I'd keep in touch with some other people that I also used to know when I was staying at the place I left three years ago. Part of the hardest thing about being homeless is not knowing. Well, part of it is not knowing when I'm going to be fed. I know. I know there's people that come around. But sometimes things happen where they don't show up. And also not knowing where I'm going to be able to get my mail while being there. There's a place I was using as a mail place, but still having to deal with that and still not being sure, being able to get my mail.

At the last campsite I ended up, it was me and a couple of people I knew, we ended up there after our camp had been swept. Our previous camp was swept and me and a couple of friends ended up at this new camp. I didn't know everybody that was there at the new camp. I sometimes have trouble opening up to new people and so there's a lot of wondering about what's going to happen from day to day. Do I know them well enough to know how they're going to respond to new events?

What I'd like people to know about homelessness is that it can happen just like that. When it happened to me, I only had two weeks to figure out what I was going to do, and then I ended up homeless and not knowing where to go from there. Even with places like City Union Mission, sometimes you still need more help than that without knowing what you can do for yourself and how.

People should be nice to the homeless. They may be going through things. They have their own things they're going through. Yes, there are a few people that have decided that being homeless is for them, but not everybody's trying to stay that way and they are trying to get through their own life, trying to get back into a better situation.

Getting out of homelessness is the hardest thing. Sometimes people may need help and not know exactly where to go to get the assistance they need. One specific thing was like I needed prompting, needed somebody to get me into gear to get my ID renewed and I knew where to go. I knew, kind of what I needed to do to get it done. It's just that I needed to be prompted to get it done. And once I got it done, it was like, Oh great, I've got it done. Now I can actually use an ID to do the next thing that I need to do.

My dream is to keep making friends, which I started doing at my new place and oh yeah, they are friends. My life is better now. For me, home is a place that I can relax if I think that the day is getting to be a little too much. I can go home, relax, and settle in. And I know that I have friends around me.