

THE ROAD TO HOMELESSNESS

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When I look back at my life I give God the praise. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of the Lord I and my family would be dead. Growing up in North Philadelphia where gangs were the special of the day, as a child I grew up in poverty. My family did not have much, but we always had a roof over our heads. My parents drank a lot and because of this, violence and alcohol were evident in our home. Thank God for welfare and housing because it kept my family together.

As a child I said I would never get on welfare when I grew up. Incest was running out of control in my neighborhood and it hit me in a bad way. I believe that this set the stage for my life. Looking for love and a better life, I was already on drugs and suffering from depression. I started going to the clubs outside of my neighborhood. I met a man at the club. He was all I needed to get me out of poverty. He told me that he would take care of me and that I would never have to work for anything, but that was far from the truth. I was nineteen years old and he was twenty-six years old. We got married after five years. The abuse started way before marriage. He used to hit me all the time, but I took it for love because my mother always hit me. In November of 1984 we got married; we had a son six months before. He canceled the wedding three times. That should have told me something, but God knew the path that I would take. We got married and he told me, "I don't have a place for us to sleep." I thought that this was a joke. Sadly, it was not. He lied to me about having a house, car, money and a job. He was riding the train with no place to go.

I hid him in my parents' house in my room for three months until I got a job and we got our first apartment. We moved out and I thought things were great, but that dream came to a complete stop. Things slowly got out of hand. We woke up fighting and went to bed fighting. He took me away from all of my loved ones, family and friends. I started noticing a pattern; when the rent was due fights would break out. One day the landlord came over for the rent and it was loud and noisy in the apartment and my husband gave me a gun for when the landlord came to the house. I wanted to run away so far, but then the court papers came, and then eviction. The time was up and we had to get out quickly.

My husband was always in control of the living arrangements. We moved in a house blocks from where we lived. My husband wrote out a bad check so that we could live there; he said that he would put money in the bank, but never did. The lady who rented the home out to us trusted my husband. He had a way about him. When I look back it was the favor of God. He was good at making promises to landlords to do work, but it never came to pass.

Nine months later, we were evicted again. My heart was so hurt. I knew God but did not walk with the Lord just yet. That eviction took me to my parents' house for a week, then to my husband's parents' home for two weeks, then back to his sister's home. My husband was working and making good money and wanted to get out of his sister's house, but my son and I were so happy because we had people to talk with and his sister had children for my son to play with. His

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sister was so sweet and always wanted to help us out, but my husband had so much pride at that time and did not want help from anyone. Just being around his sister the abuse would not be so bad. That week my husband came home from work and told me it is time to move again. We put our clothes and personal things in a trash bag. It was something about the green trash bags that made me sick inside. It reminded me of poverty and it seemed like the neighbors were looking at us like we were no good and could not take care of our children.

Now that I think about it, we could not take care of them—or ourselves.

One would have thought we stepped into the big lead, because the move this time took the family to a beautiful high-rise building. I was pregnant with a second child and sick all the time; I thought I would lose the baby because the abuse was that deep. I wanted to tell someone, but I was afraid I did not have a way out of this ongoing pain. I could not focus, and stress turned in to panic attacks. I ran in the streets crying all the time. Once I almost got ran over by a bus. I was always running, but my husband would come and get me. We both were in need of God's help. Abuse is a sickness. The person who hurts others has been hurt themselves. It is funny now, but my husband wrote other bad checks to get in this high rise. This started to be a pattern in our lives.

Seven months later, we were back in court and evicted again. What was the true turning point? When we had to take the family and sleep in our car, you feel so helpless and you look around and ask, how did we get here? Even in sleeping in the car we were still fighting just to take away the pain. Me and my husband took turns going in the hotel bathroom to wash up. I remember one day when we woke up in the car I had to take my first son in the hotel bathroom and he said, "Mom, Mom, please do not take me in there; I do not want to go in that place."

God smiled on us, because me and my husband got some money together and we moved this time to New Jersey. That was a blessing because my son had to get into school. New Jersey was different and it was very clean, but the law was very strict and they did not play when it comes to abuse. The cops came to the apartment one day, and I could clearly see that they would lock us up and take the children.

My son did get in school. Things were quiet, but that was short-lived; nine months later it was court and eviction. My husband saved money and he was Hack Man and made money to keep us in a hotel. We would visit every hotel on the Jersey strip, but the money would soon run out. We were getting some parts of welfare and that got us shelter space in Jersey. We loved the schools in Jersey, but a lady at the school told me and my husband that we had to get our son stable or they would take our children. After the school year was up we went back to Philly, back to my husband's family house again. This chain of events went on for years. It was so bad I tried to kill myself. I took some pills and just went to sleep, but I woke up. I guess God had other plans for my family. He would not let me end my life.

After leaving his parents' home, once again we journeyed to 4051 Roosevelt Blvd. This house would be dear to my heart, because I would find the love of my life, Jesus Christ, and for the first time in my life I had Hope. I was looking at Christian Television and by Faith he came in my Heart. I had a personal encounter and that saved my life. God started to clean me up and teach me how to read the Bible. Yes, the abuse and moving was in front of me; I felt a strength I never felt before. I started to have Bible studies with my children, teaching them how to pray. I found out with the help of God that prayer changes things. Every time my husband would go out or to work I would pour the word of God into my children.

The next journey took the family to Bensalem, to a hotel called Neshamy Inn. We stayed for two years or so; the children were getting big and I was instilling the Word of God daily. God said put the Word on your door and around your neck and that is what I did. Power came to my

life. My youngest son had to go to school, because of his age, but my husband did not want him to go alone. The Open Door came to get some Freedom. I went to school with my son and started to tell everyone about the Power of God, and about our homelessness.

As I started talking I noticed fear was leaving, but I was still bound. In 2001 I noticed God was giving me a voice. I would speak out at different meetings and fight for education. Even when my kids were moving all around, my husband and I kept them in good schools. The schools never knew that we did not have a home, and never knew of the abuse. In the next eleven years my family would move twenty-two times. This homelessness lasted twenty-seven years of my life and I thank God for all of my pain, because he turned it into Power in Him.

God spoke to be clear concerning Exodus 1:11-12—Therefore they did set over Taskmasters to afflict them with Burdens, but the more they afflicted them the more they multiplied and grew. My pain was not just for me, but to help others and bring them out like God did for me and my family.

The Praise is that my oldest son is an artist and singer and a powerful man of God, soon to be living in New York for the Glory of God. My Daughter is in college to be a teacher; this is the little girl who taught her little brother in the shelter and was born in distress. My youngest son is in a great school in Center City getting A's and is going to college and loves God with all his heart. God has blessed my voice to speak to nations. I am a slave for God; the Devil tried to kill me. I advocate for Education and Homelessness and I go back and forth to Harrisburg speaking about the importance of Homelessness.

I had to take this road, because now I have a passion burning on the inside concerning this issue. I will soon open up A House of Transformation, because I have truly transformed my family life. It is my job to help the forgotten people and that is what my journey to homelessness was about. God has given me a Church without Walls, because some people would never get in a building. It is time to take this message to the street where the people are hurting the most.

I am in college for Political Leadership at fifty-two—and that is a miracle. My husband whom I love and who has been with me through this journey is saved and working in the ministry with me. Now we are feeding the homeless and giving back.