

UHC: So can you tell me how you came to be homeless?

CINDY: I was robbed.

UHC: What were you doing?

CINDY: I was doing in-home care. Nursing health care?

UHC: And how did you come to be homeless?

CINDY: It was an agency I was working for, Guardian Agency. And the owner passed away from cancer, and that's how I became with no job.

UHC: What was your typical day like when you were homeless?

CINDY: Really there was no day at all. Sleeping in my car when I first got here to South Carolina, it was really nothing – worrying what to do.

UHC: So did you live in South Carolina when you were nursing?

CINDY: No that was in Tennessee.

UHC: Tennessee?

CINDY: Yeah. I'm originally from Tennessee. And I couldn't find work there, so I came here. You know, bigger city, bigger place kind of thing. But it's hard starting out here, too.

UHC: Did you know anyone when you first moved here?

CINDY: No. Nobody.

UHC: How long was it that you were living out of your car?

CINDY: I was in my car for about 2-2 ½ weeks.

UHC: How did you restart?

CINDY: When I was living in my car, I was staying at a rest area in South Carolina, and a cop had to keep running me out of there because it was only 4 hour parking. And he told me about Miracle Hill Mission. And that's where I was living in the shelter.

UHC: And how long were you at Miracle Hill?

CINDY: 3 months.

UHC: How did you get out of the shelter?

CINDY: UHC.

UHC: And how does that work?

CINDY: Talking to Glenda and getting the whole process going and stuff like that.

UHC: Did they approach you, or did you approach them?

CINDY: They actually came to the mission, and I had talked to her there.

UHC: So when you were in your car, how did you go about finding food?

CINDY: There was no really finding any. The little bit that you could get, that people would give you was used very, very sparingly.

UHC: Can you describe the person you were then? Have you changed?

CINDY: I was very depressed. What am I going to do? I had nothing to even start with, so that made it worse not having anything to start with – the whole battle of depression. Should I end this or just keep fighting?

UHC: Is there anyone or anything that kept you fighting?

CINDY: I have 4 nieces and nephews, and the thought of them kept me from ending it.

UHC: So they were the ones that kept you going.

CINDY: I would call home, and I would call them. Just thinking of them.

UHC: How many siblings do you have?

CINDY: One, a sister, who's two years older than me.

UHC: Have you seen her?

CINDY: I have. I've gone back to Tennessee once since I've been in the UHC.

UHC: When you were living in your care, did you ever think to go back home?

CINDY: I did. I thought about it, but if I had gone back then, I'd still be in the same situation. Coming here was a new start and a new life.

UHC: How long has it been since you were living in your car?

CINDY: Seven months. I was at the shelter for three months and UHC for four months.

UHC: Were there many people to help you while you were homeless?

CINDY: Just this one South Carolina state trooper who kept running me off from the rest stop. He's the one that told me about the mission. Other than that, nobody. One lady saw that I was sleeping, and she asked if I was okay, and she put \$20 on my windshield.

UHC: Have you seen the officer since then?

CINDY: No.

UHC: Who do you think had been the most helpful during the transition?

CINDY: Niece and nephews were who kept me going. Without them I probably would have done something pretty bad. Anything could have happened. You see a lot of different stories of people who were homeless in the mission. No one asks to be homeless.

UHC: Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?

CINDY: I'm a very strong person, so I try to get what I want. I want to go to Spartanburg Tech for nursing and eventually move on to OBGYN.

UHC: How old are you now?

CINDY: 24.

UHC: Why did you choose Spartanburg?

CINDY: Well it's a bigger town, and it's not too far from home. It's far enough, but, you know. You hear about Spartanburg and Greenville because they're larger cities.

UHC: Was your family supportive?

CINDY: They really didn't care. I'm not close to my family at all. I was close to my sister, but she has her own family so...

UHC: Are you happy you came down here?

CINDY: Yes. A new start, a new life. I love it. I'll never go back home. South Carolina is my home now.

UHC: Have you found Spartanburg to be pretty welcoming?

CINDY: Yes. The mission got me bus fare for 30 days. Different places help you a lot.

UHC: How did the UHC help you?

CINDY: When they go to the mission, they are bombarded with people. You have to talk to the caseworker, and you tell them what you want. I guess they just go on a feeling. They call you for a second interview.

UHC: What was a day at the shelter like?

CINDY: Chaos. You had to be up first thing in the morning. It was a lot like being in jail. You had to do Bible devotion in the morning and evening, and church was mandatory on Sunday. You had to be in by 9 pm and in your bed by 10 pm. It was a lot like being a kid again.

UHC: Did you get meals?

CINDY: Yeah.

UHC: How many people were in the shelter?

CINDY: Well, when I was there it was full. There are 3 dorms with bunk beds. Two dorms hold 11, and one holds 12. These were all women.

UHC: Was it all women, or were there men there?

CINDY: Men have one side of the dorm because there are a lot more men there than women. It's supposed to be a men's shelter, so...

UHC: Did you become friends with any of the women there?

CINDY: Yes, of course, but there was a lot of drama. But you still get close to people in there very easily. The structure at the mission is good because some people are there because they're homeless for bad reasons. It was a very good start.

UHC: Did the religious aspect of the mission help you?

CINDY: Yes. When I first when into the mission I hated God with a passion. I blamed Him for taking my grandparents when I needed them the most. If it wasn't for that place, I wouldn't have any religion at all. I would still be filled with anger.

UHC: How much money did you have when you came to South Carolina?

CINDY: I had about \$200. It was the last money I had when I left Tennessee.

UHC: What do you think the hardest thing to leave behind was?

CINDY: The more larger sentimental things that I had to leave behind that belonged to my grandparents.

UHC: What do you think you've learned?

CINDY: Probably survival. When you have a job, you know you have everything taken care of. When you become homeless, you learn how to survive with nothing and how to find food and other things. You eventually get used to it. You learn to survive.

Emotionally-wise you always worry if it will ever happen again. It happens so suddenly sometimes, and you always wonder. When you look for a job, you always look for one that you can draw unemployment off of.

UHC: Do you feel like you see what's more important in life?

CINDY: Yes. When you have, you are more materialistic. When you have nothing, you miss the simple things – a shower, your family, your friends. I had to bathe in the sink at the rest area.

UHC: Were you only allowed to stay at the mission for a certain amount of time?

CINDY: They give you 3 months then they decide what to do. They are usually harder on the men, though. They do it month to month after the 3 months.

UHC: Can you leave the mission then come back?

CINDY: Yes. You can leave and come back in a couple weeks, but it all depends on how you behaved the first time. People can get banned from the mission.

UHC: What kind of people were at the shelter?

CINDY: There were a lot of different people at the mission. Some people were there because of drugs, and some people were there because they couldn't get disability. You lose everything easily.

UHC: Do you think the homeless rate is higher in small towns because there are fewer jobs?

CINDY: I don't know. I'm from a more country place, and most country people have more family around. I think the homeless is worse here. They do offer a lot of help, but it sometimes doesn't help people who are homeless. I think the rate is higher here.

UHC: What advice would you give to someone who is homeless?

CINDY: Never give up. It can always turn around. Life will always get better. When you're homeless you hit rock bottom, the only place you can go is up. Always look up.

UHC: Do you feel you're a stronger person?

CINDY: Absolutely. I've been through a lot in my life. I was molested as a child when I was younger, and I would say being homeless is worse than that. When you're homeless you tend to let go of everybody, so...

UHC: Did you think of your grandparents when you were homeless?

CINDY: Absolutely. My grandfather would have been disappointed if I had done

something bad, and I was raised to be hard. I felt like I would have disappointed him if I had not pushed forward.

UHC: Do you think the religious part of the mission helped you with that?

CINDY: I would talk to my grandmother spiritually and ask for advice. But she couldn't help because she wasn't here. When you hit rock bottom, you always turn to things you've lost touch with. I think it helps you get through it.

UHC: Do you think the religious aspect of the mission is necessary?

CINDY: Absolutely. They help you have hope. I think that's what it does as far as the religious aspect. They pound religion hard, but it really teaches you that there is something better.

CINDY: Being homeless is not pretty at all. But it isn't as bad as what people think it to be. Most think its drug addicts and prostitutes and all, but that's not all what it is. I believe there is more homeless by accident rather than homeless from drugs and alcohol.