

Crystal: My name is Crystal, and I'm 23 years old. And I am a client of the Upstate Homeless Coalition.

Sandra: You are a resident.

Crystal: I am a resident of the Upstate Homeless Coalition.

UHC: So, first question, tell me how you became homeless.

Crystal: I don't consider myself homeless. It's odd to look at myself in the mirror, and I don't look homeless. But what happened was, me and my ex-husband, he was abusive, and for fear of my safety and my children's safety, I left the marital home. It's happened before between me and him, so I knew where to go. The first time I went to a safe home in Greenville. This time I went to a safe house in Laurens, and that's where I resided.

UHC: Could you describe the events that led to or preceded your homelessness?

Crystal: Led to my homelessness? I don't want to get into details. He was just... he was abusive, and that's why I left the home.

UHC: Could you describe a day in your life as a homeless person or your situation, rather?

Crystal: I get up every morning about 7 o'clock. Start getting ready for work. I get to work. I work from 8 to 4:30.

Sandra: But you're not considered homeless right now.

Crystal: Uh-uh. I'm not.

Sandra : Uh-uh.

Crystal: Why?

Sandra: You were homeless when we were in the shelter.

Crystal: Oh, when I was in the shelter?

UHC: Uh-hmm.

Crystal: I don't want to bad mouth the shelter. It was a very depressing time, and it didn't feel like home. It felt like I was going into another controlled situation, and we got up every morning. We had to be up by a certain time, and it was hard for me because I have my son who is very fat. And I think, how old was he? He was probably four...

Sandra: Five.

Crystal: Five months old. He was real young, and my daughter was about two and a half, I think. So I had to get up. I had to get them breakfast. He was still on bottles. You know, it was really hard. I struggled a lot with taking care of them by myself, and the fact that I was struggling with depression and still in shock about what had happened between me and my ex-husband at the same time. But I had to get up, give them their food. I had to bathe them and try to look for a job, at the same time. Try to...

Sandra: Don't forget the chores that we had.

Crystal: We had chores in prison. We had to rotate them out. Sometimes it was mopping. Sometimes it was cooking. I hated cooking. I still hate cooking. I don't cook during the week when I'm by myself. I only cook when I have my kids. It was terrible. But they let me and her partner up when we were at the home, and we worked it out really good. But, it was hard. I struggled with it. You know, I was depressed all the time, and it was another controlled place. And it wasn't fun at all.

UHC: Who, if anyone, influenced your actions, and please tell me about he, she, or they, and how they influenced you - if it was positive or negative.

Crystal: She...Sandra...Peaches, I call her Peaches. She had a big influence on me. I think she got there at the home two...

Sandra: Two days.

Crystal: A couple of days after me. She frightened me at first. She took Cole...

Sandra: Her son.

Crystal: ...my son without me knowing and taking care... caring for him when I wasn't in the room. And I walked in the room to see a stranger holding my child. Walked downstairs to question the other women to make sure she wasn't crazy, and they said she was fine, and me and her had a really tight bond after that. And we still do. She's my mother, and she's my best friend at the same time. I can tell her things that I couldn't tell even my closest friends, and she's helped me through a lot of stuff. She's given me a shoulder to cry on. She's given me money advice. She's given me boy advice. I mean, she has really been my, she's been my rock.

UHC: How would you describe the person that you were then?

Crystal: I would describe myself as hopeless. I didn't have much faith in myself. I was very frightened that I wasn't going to make it, that I was going to lose my kids because when I was with my ex-husband, he was the breadwinner, you know. He brought home the money, and I stayed home and took care of the kids. No matter what I did, it wasn't good enough for him, so I already felt bad about myself. I felt I was inadequate. When I came to the safe home, I was still in that fragile state of mind - still in shock about the whole thing, and Peaches was the only thing that got

me through. She helped me with my kids. She helped me with cooking. She helped me doing cleaning. She helped me do everything, and without her, I wouldn't be the strong independent woman that I am now.

UHC: Besides the safe home, was there any other way that you had to go about finding food or shelter, or was that the first place that you went to?

Crystal: That was the first place that I went to, and they provided food there. But as I tried to separate myself from the safe home, there's governmental organizations or agencies that you can go to. The first one I went to was... oh, what is that called?

Sandra: DSS.

Crystal: DSS? I got on food stamps as soon as I could, only because I knew I was trying...in the process of getting into my own place. And I had to find a way that I could provide food for my kids, and with me not working and the little money I had for child support, you know, that was the best place for me to go.

UHC: Okay. How did you get involved with the Upstate Homeless Coalition?

Crystal: Peaches...I don't know how she got to know about them, but she knew about them before I did. And once she got on with them, she told me about it. She said, "There's this man named Steve, and he's helping us get into houses." And she was like, "You need to go down there and find out about it and get an application." So, I went down there and filled out an application, and I questioned the ladies that work there almost daily, "Have you heard from Steve? Have you heard from Steve? Do you know anything about this organization?" And I prayed and prayed and prayed for this man, whoever he was, to come to the safe home and give me a place to live because I really wanted to be out of there, and I wanted to begin the steps in my life to take care of my kids. So, eventually, he came, and me and him got to talking. And here I am.

UHC: How could you explain your shift from being homeless to your current situation in transitional housing?

Crystal: Wonderful. (Laughs.) It was wonderful. God answered my prayers. I haven't had any trouble living here, and it's a nice apartment that I live in. And it's functional, and I haven't had any problems with it whatsoever.

UHC: Where do you see yourself in five years?

Crystal: I'm taking itty-bitty steps. In five years, I hope to have enough money saved up to be in some kind of home of my own, whether it be a mobile home or a brick house somewhere. I hope to have my own house and still be working at the job that I'm at right now.

UHC: Describe the person you hope to be then. Compare the person that you hope to be with the person that you were and that you are now.

Crystal: Huh?

Sandra: The person you hope to be, the person you were, and the person you are.

Crystal: The person that I was? Very sad, very depressed, very fragile, not confident with myself at all. I hope to be entirely independent of anyone - not having to depend on anyone, and I also hope to be stronger in faith. I'm still lacking that right now. I still...I have faith, but I'm not doing it like I'm supposed to be doing it. I'm beginning to find myself. I'm beginning to know what I want: out of myself, out of a relationship, and out of my life in general. And that's going to help me in taking the steps to getting what I want. That's going to help me be the person that I want to be. Hopefully, be married again - I'm not going to let what happened to me discourage me at all. I do hope to be married again, and I'm feeling oriented. I want to have a family, and I want to share love with somebody. I hope that I can do that in a structured home. So, I hope to be in a home with a loving person, and since I am beginning to find who I am and what I want, I think it will be good. I think I'm mature enough. Now my life is going to be good.

UHC: Do you have joint custody of your kids right now with your ex-husband?

Crystal: Uh-hmm. UHC: Who has been most helpful to you during your transition, and how has she been helpful?

Crystal: Well, first of all, the Upstate Homeless Coalition has been the most helpful and also Peaches. I give her credit. I give God credit. Without these people in my life, I wouldn't be where I am right now. I give credit to them.

UHC: After having these experiences, what advice would you give someone who is homeless?

Crystal: There is hope. There is hope for anybody. There is power in prayer. If you have the opportunity to help you should do it. I'm not your typical homeless person, and just be a Good Samaritan is what I'd say.

UHC: Is there anything that you might not have thought of before, or that occurred to you during this interview?

Crystal: Hmmm...

UHC: You're still the same? You still think about all the same things?

Crystal: Uh-hmm.

UHC: Nothing has been a surprise in the questions that we've asked?

Crystal: Uh-uh. Nothing has been a surprise yet.

Sandra: She said "yet." (Laughs.)

UHC: (Laughs.) How long were you in that relationship?

Crystal: Let's see. Okay, my ex-husband and my brother were best friends all through school - high school, middle school, elementary school, all of them. I met him through my brother. He also was going to our family church. And me and him liked each other, and you know how you do in high school. We flirted back and forth, and I have a boyfriend, and he has a girlfriend. But she doesn't really do anything because of that. The timing wasn't really good then. I moved to Texas when he was living out here. When it came time for me to graduate high school, he came out there, and the second day he was there, which was May 9th 2002. He asked me if I'd be his girlfriend. I said "Yes, yes." He was so fine. The day after I graduated, we drove all the way back out here, and I was living with my dad. He was living with his parents. I think he was 19, and I was 17. We just dated for a long time, and then August 3rd 2002, he proposed to me. Like a dummy, I said "yes." Then January... January, February, I found out I was pregnant with my daughter, my first child. It was funny. And I really shouldn't be talking about this, but I went to the health department to get put on birth control, and that's when I found out I Was pregnant. And I had planned on breaking up with him and ending the relationship and breaking off the wedding because...

UHC: But there wasn't any abuse then?

Crystal: It was mainly...it was a little bit of emotional abuse, not a whole lot. You know, we were still young, and I don't want to say in love, you know. I just, I think I was infatuated with him. There was an attraction thing there, because he was fine. (Laughs.)

UHC: (Laughs.) And how old were you when you were, when you got pregnant with your daughter?

Crystal: How old was I? I was 18, and I was 19 when I had her. And thank God I had already graduated high school when I got pregnant. Praise God, because I probably wouldn't have made it if I had got pregnant with her in high school. But when I found out I was pregnant, I thought, God, I got to do the right thing. I got to go ahead and get married. I don't want my child to be without her father. That was my thought. And even my family tried to stop me, but I wouldn't let them. I went ahead with it. I was going to make it work, and it wasn't too long after the honeymoon - I mean, the honeymoon lasted a week - it wasn't too long after that I noticed he was controlling. He was controlling with everything: money, sex, cars, who I could and couldn't talk to. He was very controlling of all those things, and he had to have say so over that. It wasn't too long after that that the abuse began. It started out small, and then it got bigger and bigger. It became a vicious circle. The longer it took for him to explode, the worse the explosion was. I left him. The first time I left him I went to

Texas with my daughter. I had already had her. She was, like, four months old. I was gone for about two weeks. He was actually going to let me go. I went to a safe home in Greenville, and my mom drove all the way out here from Texas to pick me up. We went to Texas, and I was there for two weeks. And he was like, "Well, if this is what you want to do, I'm going to let you do it" because he didn't really want to have nothing to do with my daughter anyway. He was... through the whole pregnancy, he never supported me. His mother, my mother-in-law always went with me to the appointments. Once he found out it was a girl, he didn't want anything to do with her whatsoever. He didn't. He went to his room when he found out. It was the only doctor's appointment he went to with me. They said, "It's a girl." He got... I mean, I could have died when I seen his face. When we got home - we were living with his parents. We had already gotten married, and he ran down to his room crying saying he didn't want her, to take her back. I mean, he was just very immature. He's matured now as far as being a man and paying the bills, and all that kind of stuff. He's, he definitely believes in the family structure. He goes to church every Sunday and Wednesday night. He's a deacon. Okay, he's in the choir. He does not miss church for nothing, but he's sick. He's very good with the kids. You wouldn't believe how good he is with the kids. He takes very good care of them. He gets his daughter up every single morning, and... well, he has help from his family too. His family... he has a whole lot more family support than I do. My family is either in Texas or they're just not able to do it. But he's good with kids, and he pays his bills. And he goes to church, and he does all these things. But when it comes to a relationship, he doesn't know how to let go of control. Everything has to be his way or the highway, and that's where he falls short. That and his temper, and I believe it's something... he probably has a mental disorder. We went to marriage counseling one time, and the psychiatrist couldn't diagnose him with it, but he recommended he was bi-polar and recommended for him to get on some medicine. He went to the doctor, and he got on medicine he took for about a week and he said it made him go to the bathroom too much and got off of it. When he was on that medicine, he was like an angel. After he got off of it, he was right back to raising hell. So that's one thing about it that boggles my mind, that he is a perfect citizen, a perfect father, a perfect Christian in the church's eyes, but whenever it comes to being loved and loving someone, he's just not capable of it.

UHC: So, how often do you get to see your children?

Crystal: I see them every weekend.

UHC: Every weekend?

Crystal: Uh-hmm. There is a work conflict where sometimes I have to work weekends once a month, sometimes twice a month. So I'll get them on my days off when I work the weekends. I still get two days off, and they're with me then. He's usually pretty good about working with me, but whenever he does have a problem with something it's...(shakes head.)

UHC: Even now? Now that y'all aren't married?

Crystal: Uh-hmm. He still has control over me in a sense.

UHC: How is that?

Crystal: Let's see. One time he called, this was actually a few weekends ago, he called, and I was at my friends house. We had a women's night - a couple of my friends from work. I went to my girlfriend's house, and all our kids were over there. I had brought some pizzas and drinks, and I brought some movies over there. And while we ate and watched movies, we did each other's eyebrows and feet, and they cut my hair and dyed it. And it was starting to get late, and I noticed it. It was like 9:45, and they had just started watching another movie. And he had been calling and calling my cell phone, and I seen it. And I was like, "Well, I'll just ignore him." And he kept calling and calling, and I had like five different voicemails. So I answered the phone, and he was like, "What's going on? Why aren't you answering your phone?" And I was like, "I'm busy right now." He was like, "Where are my kids?" And I was like, "Right here." And he was like, "Let me talk to them." So I let him talk to them, and he raising Cain about why they weren't in bed. He was like, "You know they're supposed to be in bed by 8 o'clock every night." And "Why can't you do this?" And "Why can't you do that? You're such a..." You know, and he started with the names. Sometimes he does get the best of me. I'll begin to cry, and we'll begin to argue back and forth with each other. It doesn't get nowhere, and it doesn't effect him at all. I mean, he gets mad, and he'll yell at me. But he's unemotional about it. With me, I get all emotional, and I have panic attacks, too. I take medicine for it, but sometimes I forget. Or sometimes I can't help it, and I'll begin having a panic attack, or I'll start crying uncontrollably. I'll go into a deep depression, and all I'll want to do is sleep and don't want to be bothered by nobody. It causes headaches. I mean, when he yells at me like that, it makes me cry. It's his way or the highway. If I don't do the way...if I don't do things the way I'm supposed to do them...if I don't do things the way he tells me to do them, then I'm going to get yelled at whether we're together or not.

UHC: Do you worry about your children being with him?

Crystal: Yeah. Not because he will hurt them. I don't think he will hurt them. If he does, he's going to get hurt back. I worry about the children being with him because he is very racist, and he teaches them racist things. Madison... I listen to 93.7. I listen to 98.1. It's a mix of different songs, and some of them are hip-hop and R&B. And he hates it. He thinks that white people should listen to country, and white people should listen to gospel or Christian music. You should never listen to music played on... like rap and R&B and that stuff. It's just bad. He thinks that - not all of them - but he thinks that the majority of black people are trash, and I don't agree with that at all. My boyfriend now, he's mixed. He's half white, and he's half black. I'm half white, and I'm half Hispanic. I mean, I am a mixed race. I mean, if you're all about white power, why did you marry someone who was of a mixed race? It doesn't make any

sense to me. Your children are a quarter Hispanic. Why are you going to teach your children about white supremacy? And he teaches them about... not to hug on or to kiss Peaches because she's a...brown... she doesn't say black. Madison says brown. Sometimes she'll get in the car with me and say, "Mommy, Daddy doesn't like brown music. He says to turn it off." She says little things like that, and even though she's not... she's smart. She knows what she's saying, but then again she doesn't know what she's saying. All she knows is that she needs to be doing what her daddy tells her to do, and that's what she does. And I tell her, "Madison, you definitely need to do what your Mommy and Daddy tell you to do. You're supposed to do what your parents tell you to do. But Jesus loves everybody, no matter what color they are, and Daddy can't tell Mommy what to do." And I was like, "You have to be nice to everyone. That doesn't mean you have to kiss someone that you don't want to. You don't have to hug someone you don't want to, and you don't have to talk to them if you don't want to. But you have to be nice and respectful." Okay, it hadn't been too long ago that me and him had actually tried to work it out a couple of months ago. It didn't work out at all. It wasn't but about a week of being with him, he said the "n" word in front of her, and she repeated it and asked what it was because he can't stand the thought that I have a half black boyfriend. He didn't even see the white part. He saw black, and his eyes got red. He could not stand the thought at all. He could not stand that his ex-wife was with somebody who was trash. "Why would you be with somebody who's trash when I'm so much better than him?" And he would always ask me questions, ask me questions about sex and about money and where did he live and what did he do and was he better than me. Was he better in bed? Just retarded stuff to make himself feel better about why I did it. And he happened to be asking me these questions in front of my daughter. And he used the "n" word, and she repeated it. And it was the very next day that I left, and I didn't go back because I just do not agree with it at all.

UHC: So you said you left when your daughter was two, you said?

Crystal: The first time that I left him she was about 2 or 3 months old.

UHC: Oh, okay, so how did you...what... when he said he was going to let you go, what made you go back into that situation, have another child with him?

Crystal: Before I had my second child, whenever Madison was 3 or 4 months old, I was in Texas. He called. His parents would call and ask to talk to Madison - a little bit to me, but not so much. He couldn't understand why I left. Up to that point, it wasn't terribly bad, but it scared me. It scared me really, really bad. I've never been through anything like that before in my life. Before to him, it wasn't that bad. To me it was. So now I will sit here and say he did not beat on me. A lot of women will say he did, but he did not beat on me. He abused me. There was no... how can I explain it? I didn't have bruises. I was never bleeding when he beat on me. It was stuff. It was petty. It was things like he would spit on me. He would pull my hair. And this sounds weird because he was my husband, but he would molest me. He would force me to have sex with him. He would smother me with pillows. When I was 3 months

pregnant with my son, the second time I left him, he grabbed me up by my ankles. No, this is the third time I left him. I left him many times. He grabbed me up by my ankles off the recliner and dragged me across the floor. He jerked me off the recliner and dragged me across the floor. That's the only time I ever had marks on me. I had rug burns on my elbows and the back of my legs. He slapped me. He spit on me. He pulled my hair. He took a pillow like this off the couch and hit me repeatedly with it as hard as he could, which you wouldn't think that this would hurt too bad. I mean, most girls have been in pillow fights before. But when he hit me with the force that he used, I mean, it almost knocked the wind out of me. It hurt really bad. But I wouldn't call it beating on me. The reason that I went back to him after I left him the first time was because he wrote a note, and it was after two weeks that I'd been out there. He wrote a note saying how much he missed me and loved me, and if this is what I wanted, he was going to let me go. He had started to going to counseling that his parents were paying for, and he was on medicine, which was the Wellbutrin. He was on that medicine. He was already starting to feel better, and he was sorry and all this kind of stuff, which is what I wanted to hear because I wanted things to work out. I never wanted to leave him. I wanted to be a family. So I started crying, and I started missing him. That's when you start remembering the good times, and maybe I can work it out. And so him, his mom, and his grandpa drove all the way out to Texas and picked me and my daughter up. And as soon as I got in the car, I knew I had made the wrong choice because he looked at me like he was going to kill me. When we got back for a whole week, to get back at me, he would go out every single night and get drunk with somebody he worked with and was hanging around girls I didn't know. He wouldn't tell me where he was going, when he was coming back. "Are you taking your cell phone, if yeah, can I call you?" If he did take it, he wouldn't answer the phone, wouldn't come back until like midnight. (Recording ends.)