

UHC: So I guess, like, just tell us, like, your story, like how you became homeless in the first place, and the whole...whatever you want, whatever you want...

Mary: I became homeless about six years ago. I was on drugs real heavy. My drug of choice was crack cocaine. First it started out with alcohol, and I guess, alcohol got me high to a certain point, and it wasn't getting me high no more. So then it led to marijuana. Then it led to crack cocaine, and I did crack cocaine for, like, 26 years. Out of 26 years, I did anything to support my habit, but I didn't prostitute. What I did, you know, like, even if you talk about your body in a certain way, you're a prostitute. But I did what I had to do to support my drug habit. I mean I stole from my family. I stole from other people. I robbed people, you know. And I was in and out of jail for a while. I did 17 years in jail out of my whole life, you know. In prison...I went to prison for [?????]. I mean, you know, [?????]. And I came out of prison. After I came out of prison, I was in and out of jail. They told me that the state of South Carolina said I'm not allowed to have a weapon on me. So after I got out of prison and I was back on drugs again, I couldn't wait to get out of prison so I could get back on drugs. Most of my days I spent in jail was about disorderly conduct and public drunk and all that. But in the year my drugs took me to my lowest point in my life. You know it took me to where I was homeless. I was eating out of the trashcan. I slept underneath the church just to have somewhere to...a dry place to lay my head when it rained and stuff. And in 2004, I slept underneath the church for two weeks without food and without water. And when I came out, I passed out in this lady's yard, this sweet little old lady. She called EMS and everything. She stayed with me there until they got there, and she went to the hospital with me. And then I found out I had diabetes and high blood pressure, a lot of medical issues that needed attending, you know. But I went in and out of institutions all my life I was in and out of treatment centers. And I think in 2004 at my lowest point in my life, when my family cut me loose, you know, because I used to use them to the point, I used to lie to them, manipulate them, just to get money, just to get my drugs and stuff to get high and you know. I wasn't there for my kids, and I did get to see my grandbaby born, but I was on drugs then. But in 2005 when I slept underneath the church, and I found out I had all these medical problems, I went to the treatment center in Newberry, where I'm from. And they told me I'd be there 28 days. I told them 28 days wasn't going to do me any good. I said I need long-term treatment. So you know, I told them, "Look, I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." You know? I'm tired of the way I'm living, you know. That's just how desperate I was to get off drugs. And they called Rosewood. And the lady downstairs, Miss Venus, she was the one that I spoke with over the telephone, and I can remember her asking me saying, "Are you ready? Are you ready?" I didn't pause, and I didn't hesitate. I said, "I'm ready." She said, "It's not going to be easy." I said, "Doing drugs wasn't easy." So when I got to Rosewood, I saw where it was, you know, and I'm like, "I'm in the boondocks?" And, you know, once you get there you got to be drug tested. So, you know, I [????], and I did. When I got there I was very nervous because I was afraid that I wasn't going to pass the drug test to get in. So they did the drug test, and then they told me to bring my stuff on in. I passed and everything. I didn't want to be at Rosewood, and in a couple of weeks when I first got there I didn't want to be there. Because I was so far away from home and you know. Which that didn't matter anyway because my family had cut me off and everything. But it's just the point. It's like I was missing something, you know. And you

know, I was more focused on what my smoking buddies back in Newberry were doing, how they were getting high, and here I am sitting up in this building with these ten womens, you know. I tried everything I could to get kicked out of Rosewood, but they wouldn't kick me out. But Rosewood, when Miss Venus told me I had to be there six months to a year, I looked at her. She said, "Don't be looking at me like that." I'm like, "Who going to be here six months?" You know? But as I got into Rosewood, and I started making meetings and started dealing with issues that I needed to deal with, you know, and applying myself to what I really wanted, and came to understand that I didn't want to live the way I lived, but I had to make a change and what I had to do. But Rosewood, they make you clean. They [????]. When they told me I had to clean [???], they told me I had to clean bathrooms. They told me they do inspection on the rooms, and I looked out across there, and they told me to cut this big old yard one day. I was like, "It's time to go. It's time to go." But you know, Rosewood taught me a lot. You know? The staff at Rosewood and Miss Nancy, Miss Nancy Smith is best, you know, you know. She's nice, but she's firm. Miss Venus, she nice, but she put it to you real. I mean she keep it real. She tell you just like it is. She don't care if you like it or not, you know. And you know, it's a lot of my stuff that they called me on, you know. "Now, Mary, you know you shouldn't be doing that. You know that ain't right." And you know? I couldn't, I couldn't take it at first, but as I started to listening to them and doing as they asked me, you know, it started falling in place. But Rosewood, it's a long-term treatment. I stayed there 21 months. 21 months. Almost two years. But as I went through Rosewood, I learned respect. I learned self-respect. They disciplined me. They broke me down. It's almost like a rebirth. They broke me down and built me back up. They raised me up from a baby. They instilled in me a lot of things, you know. People look at Rosewood and say it is hard. Rosewood teach you everyday living, things you will have to do every day. And I thank Rosewood for that because, you know, Rosewood started my road to recovery. You know, Rosewood helped me start over. You know? And I walked through a lot of pain, and I dealt with things that I didn't want to deal with, you know. And once I got into recovery and started understanding the issues that I was dealing with, you know, I was able to move on and change and everything. But Rosewood, Rosewood's the best. It's the best. I mean, Rosewood, they just strict. We wasn't allowed to have contact with men, but you know, at the meetings we sneak in. Talk to them and all that, you know. But you couldn't get caught. But you know. I did my little dirt there, you know. But I kept focused on why I was there, you know. And I also have a mental illness, and I know the difference between when my mental illness is getting ready to flare up. And I know the difference between my drug addiction. I'm dealing with both of them at the same time. But, you know, me, when I left Rosewood, they gave me a graduation party. I graduated. They furnish everything you need, from the pots and pans and all that. But most of the stuff I bought at the yard sale, you know. They [???] bar me from shopping. [???] But when I left Rosewood, I didn't want to leave. I, in a way I was ready to leave because I didn't want to become co-dependent. But then again, I didn't want to leave because it were my safe haven, and I was scared to step out on my own. But you know, once I came over here and saw where I was going to be living and everything, I'm like, "Wow!" You know? I got my own place, you know? And you know, that's the happiest part about it, you know, because at Rosewood I found the God of my understanding. I found God, and you know, God played a big part...well, God brought me through it all. You know, it's

nothing I done. It's by His grace and mercy that I made it. But I give praise to Him because He's still blessing me. Even here, you know, you got some that's still using, and you got some that's still struggling. But that doesn't, that doesn't interfere with what I want to do. You know, I have no desire to use, you know. The thought get there, I get it out. You know, I don't act upon that thought because I know where I came from, you know. And I don't want to go back to where I was. But then, you know, I got in here, and I start fixing the place up, you know. And when I start shopping, they told me, "Don't put nothing else in that apartment." So you know, you see it this way now, but you come back tomorrow or Wednesday it'll be turned around again. But here at Reedy Place, Reedy Place is a destination that God put me here. He put me here for a reason. And you know, whatever that reason is, it's not for me to understand. And you know, I don't try to understand it because, you know, I still have my bad moments and my bad days. But I'm still struggling here. You know, recovery is just not putting out the drugs and think you're cured and thing, you know. You got to work. You go to work, and you know, I'm struggling right now. I'm dealing with some issues right now, but I doesn't let it put the thought in my head that drugs is the answer, you know what I'm saying? Because that's not the answer. But, on an overall basis, Reedy Place is the best place right now I could be. I mean the staff just, they listen to you, and they there for you. And Miss Venus is so loving and kind, and Upstate Homeless, they right there with us. You know, if it wasn't been for they making they dream come true, then my dream wouldn't come true. Mr. Mike, Mike Chester, love him to death. Love him to death because he made a dream come true. He made my...Miss [???], she's a mess, but I love her anyway. You know, but Upstate Homeless, God brought them to me. You know? God brought them in my life for a reason. And you know, they say the housing is permanent, but you know, we as humans say, "I'm not going to be here all my life." But I'm a child of God. I'm going to be here as long as God want me to be here. You know, I'm not going to step out there and say, "I'm leaving." [???] God going to go first because I'd mess it up every time. I mean, this place here is the best place that...that, you know, you can deal with issues, you know. And you got people that there for you, a support system and everything. And you know, Miss Venus is my angel. She's my angel. I feel that God sent her from heaven down to watch over me because she listen to me cry, and she seen me stubborn. I mean, she seen me at my worse. And I'm not co-dependent on her now because if I, when I leave I'm going to leave confidently because I know if I need her, she's right there for me. But me? I'm happy today. I'm not all...right now I'm not at a good place, but that's okay too. That's okay, too. But I don't have the desire to use. I have no temptation to use. But today, my life is complete because I have God [???]. And you know, I don't forget about Him. And you know, if I had to go through my life again, yeah I'd walk through it again, if God wanted me to. Because you know, I don't think God'd take me back there. You know, He would let me, he would let me make that choice myself, but He would try to stop me from [???]. And you know, I'm a person that I believe strongly in my recovery. You know, I don't socialize with people who uses drugs. You know, because I know manipulation. I know, I know the game. You know, I know how to play the game. And you know, that's one game I don't want to play no more because you know, because I know for me to go back to use, there ain't nothing but one place I'm going, and that's to the graveyard. Because if I ever go back out, I ain't coming back in. Because my disease is prospering while I'm not even using. So you know, that's not a life I don't want to live

no more. But I love this place, although you know I go through stuff here. Still love it. [Interviewer says something??] Yeah, that's right. You got to deal with it, you know. You got to take the good with the bad. The bitter with the sweet. But I am happy today. I really am. I got a relationship with my family. I got my kids back. I got my grandbaby. I'm going home to see my grandbaby this weekend. So you know, all these right here are my family. I got a fiancé today. He's not in this room. He's in that room. I got a fiancé. I just got a new son-in-law. My daughter just got married. All told together with my kids, with my grandchildren, and my step grandchildren, I have 17 grandchildren all together. And me and my mom got a perfect relationship. Now I'm not going to say perfect, but she understand more about what I was going through then. You know, I tries to educate them on what I went through. And when I go home, they go to meetings with me. They make sure I'm at a meeting somewhere. They don't...they make sure I'm not where I don't supposed to be. But see, they can't watch over me all the time when I go home because it's up to me to work my recovery. Because if I go over there and know I'm not supposed to be over there, then I know that [???]. But today, I wouldn't give nothing for my life [???], but today God is the head of my life. And I thank Mike Chester and all of them that were involved in putting this place together.

UHC: So, I guess, like, you have all this stuff now where do you want to be in, like, the future, like, five years down the road, what do you want to be, how do you want to be then?

UHC: Have you thought about it?

Mary: You know, looking at it from my point of view, I would like to own me...be buying me a house. I would like to have a car, which I do have my permit [???] my license. And I would like to one day get off disability and be able to hold down a full-time job. But where God want me at in five years, I'm not going to interrupt His plan. When more people ask me that question, where I would like to be in five years, wherever God place me.

UHC: So were you living with your parents before?

Mary: No, I was living on my own.

UHC: Okay, you were living on your own.

Mary: When I was in Newberry, I was living on my own.

UHC: Okay.

UHC: I guess, how did you, like, how did you, like, discover you had this whole group of people, like, how did, who influenced you to help you find...like, you said you were under the church, and the woman, you passed out in her yard, but you went to the hospital...?

Mary: I slept underneath the church for two weeks, and you know, this preacher the Sunday that I came out from underneath the church, he preached about young people going to jail for...going to jail and prison for drugs and stuff. And you know, I'm laying underneath the church listening to this. And it's like something came to me and said, "Get up and go." Just go. And you know, I passed out in this lady's yard, and this lady called the EMS, and I went to the doctor and everything.

UHC: And they told you about places you could go or how did you find out about the program?

Mary: I went to Westview, in Newberry, treatment center, and I went from...Miss Jackie Walker there called Rosewood. And Rosewood, Venus called me back, and she told me, "Come on Monday, then." And when I got to Rosewood, you know, they didn't know where I was going after I graduated. And then this program came up, so I got recommended for this program, and when I graduated, I came from Rosewood to here.

UHC: How did you, like, get by, like a typical day when you were homeless, like, how did you get the things you needed on a day to day basis?

Mary: When I were on drugs? I stole. I stole. I manipulated, you know. I threatened people. I robbed people. You know, I didn't care how I got it. Any means necessary. Any means.

UHC: How would you describe, like, I guess you already talked a lot about it, but, how you were then compared to how you are now? You've already talked a lot about it, but...

Mary: How I was then to how I am now? Whoa! I think ya'll should have gotten a [??????] put on that. Me? When I was out there on drugs, I didn't care about nothing or nobody. Nasty attitude. Very violent. Didn't give a damn. You know, hate...full of hate and anger. But me, I'm not going to say I was a thug or a gangster, but I was close. I was close. I didn't like the way I was then, but the way I am now I don't, I don't take too much, I don't take people, I don't get close to people too much now. You know, I'm very careful who I let close to me because I have to be very careful who I deal with. I'm nice. I get pissed off sometimes. Sometimes I step back into the old ways when I have to realize. I've got to come back to the new way now, but I'm not like I used to be. I'm not...I'm a long way from what I used to be. You know, today I know where I want to go in life. I appreciate what I got in life, and I understand what I got to do to make it in life. Yeah, you know, and that's the difference between me back then and me now because I got responsibility. And you know, sometimes it get hard, but you know when you start building those bridges back that you burnt, making amends, it feel good. It feel good.

UHC: I guess, like, you talked about everybody that helped you, but who do you think has been the most helpful to you during this whole transition period? I mean, if you don't have to pick just one because that's probably hard.

Mary: This whole transitional period who been the most helpful? Rosewood. Rosewood because you know Rosewood is still part of my support group. And you know, no matter when I need them, they're there for me. Because, you know, I started out at Rosewood at my lowest, and you know, I cussed a lot of staff out there, but they still stuck by me. And they still sticking by me, even with what's going on with me today. They are there for me. They are there for me. And I would say the girls at Rosewood. You know, because they give me the strength to strive and keep going because all the girls I started out with at Rosewood that were there when I was there came in when I came in. All of them relapsed except me. And that give me determination to move on. I still persevere, you know, no matter what I'm going through. I still persevere, you know. And God let me know, that's not your fight, you know. Focus on you now. He let me know I'd be all right. But I would have to say Rosewood.

UHC: What about for other people who are homeless? Do you have advice that you would give to them in the future to say, “Don’t do this” or “Don’t do this” “stay away from that” or “go find help” or yeah do you have...?

Mary: I would try to let them know that there are organizations out there. I would tell them my story and let them know where I come from. And I would let them know that there is hope, but I wouldn’t look down on them. Because, you know, I would tell them, “Hey, I used to be you.” You know? I can move in the biggest mansion tonight. I can, but that still don’t say I’m better than that homeless person that’s still out there. Because you know, people put a stigma on homeless people, you know. Until, until they understand what a home...until they’ve not been homeless, they don’t understand what a homeless person goes through. See, you got people that say all right they know they don’t need to be doing this; they don’t have to live like that. They ain’t got to do this, do that, but they don’t understand what that person is dealing with or what that person is going through. And, you see, I don’t like society putting a stigma on homeless people because now when they looks at me, they like, “You were homeless?” Yes, I was homeless. You know, and I can’t look down on another man, you know? I can’t look down on a homeless person because I’m here. Because that used to me. And you know, if the one’s out there putting the stigma on the homeless people, they better be careful because that could be them out there. You know, it pisses me off because you know, they don’t understand homeless because they ain’t ever been there. You know, and there’s nothing wrong with being homeless. It’s just a phase that God take you through. You know? People that live in a fine house and drive a fine car or whatever. The homeless person got more faith than that person with everything he got. More faith in God than anybody because of that. Because a homeless person need God to take them through that. You know what I’m saying? Me? I know the value of a dollar today. I know what I got to do to keep what I got. But you know, I never know when God is going to come and say, “Okay, it’s time to move.” And you know, my destination might be back on the street again. Who knows? But you know, you don’t never, you don’t...they look down on homeless people too much, instead of trying to steer them in the right direction...instead of trying to, trying to say, “Okay, I’m going to help you to get help” or whatever. You know? Or set up a foundation...set up something...give to the homeless shelter where they can place them in organizations and stuff...but you know society got to have a reason to talk. You know what I’m saying? But I hope one day that everybody make it. You know? I hope I everybody make it.

UHC: Do you think that most people who are homeless, like, know about the places that they can be helped, or do you think, like, in your experience, did you know about all these places?

Mary: See Newberry don’t have all the places that Greenville does. You know, I don’t know about all the places in Greenville, you know. And I don’t want to learn Greenville. I don’t want to learn it. I just need to know where I got to go to take care of business back home. But if the society, the society and the mayor, the police department, you get organizations like that instead of locking them up, put them in treatment. You know what I’m saying? When they come out of treatment, steer them in the right direction. You know, don’t wait on them to come back to jail again. You know what I’m saying? You know, when they get ready to get released, say, “Okay, I understand your past.” You know? Give them booklet and pamphlet and offer organizations and places that are in

Greenville that are available instead of putting the stigma on them. And you see, when they supposed to be role models, but when your role models start putting stigmas on you, then, you know, we got a problem. Then we got a problem.

UHC: So you think if more people knew about the places they could go, if people in charge, or whatever, gave people that information that things...?

Mary: If people knew where to go and all that, yes, I think they would go. But, you know, they always say money is what makes the world go round. You know, but some people cannot afford it. Those are the ones that you reach way deep down and pull up. Now the one's that are just out there for the bull, you know, and if you were homeless like I was you would know the ones that are playing the game. But the ones that ain't got no money, and the ones that want to get off the street, you got to give them the opportunity, you know, reach down and say, "Okay, we will get you some help." You know, just don't say, "Well, there's help out there; you can look around and find it." See, I had to be guided. I had to have my decision made for me until I learned how to make my own decisions. And I'm still being guided. I'm being guided all the time. You know, my [???], my [???], all of them guide me. You know, and I don't look down on no organizations. I don't look down on what nobody does. But if they would put more effort into helping the homeless, instead of talking about it, there wouldn't be so many homeless people out there. You know, it's just like, President Bush, he send money way over into Afghanistan and them places and we got homeless children, you know? If the ones that lead the country can't help you...

UHC: There's a problem. That's true. I guess...I don't know. You've answered all of the questions. You did a really good job. Like, anything at all that, like, you thought about, you know, answering these questions that you haven't, like, thought about before or anything?

Mary: No, I would just like to leave on a message on my interview for the homeless, you know, don't give up hope. Don't give up hope. You know, if you give up then you won't prosper. But if you keep faith and let God guide you, anything is possible. You know, walk with your head up high. Don't walk with it down, you know, because one day God will step in. He will intervene. God's just got you where he wants you. It'll be all right. The end.

UHC: The end.