

UHC: Okay, Mary, have you actually been homeless?

Mary: (Nods head.) Yeah.

UHC: Can you tell about a day, like, in the life of being a homeless woman?

Mary: It's terrible. It's bad either way whether you got kids or not, but to me it's worse when you got kids because you got to worry about, you know, where my children going to sleep? Well, I had my little boy but he... I always somehow managed to find somewhere for him to go 'cause there was a time for like two or three months I had, like...when was it...October of last year to beginning of December, I had to sleep in my car. So, and you can imagine how bad that was.

UHC: Absolutely.

Mary: So when I found, you know, what my situation was, well I said I got find somewhere for Traylor. Traylor's my little boy. He's 12 years old. I said I got to find somewhere to put Trayl. So I talked to one of my friends, and she said well she was already overcrowded. And I just told her I said please let him stay, you know, because he was 11 at the time. Just let him stay in there, you know, I'll by food or whatever. Just let him stay. So she let him stay. I was working up here doing hair, 'cause see I do hair. I was working up here at Cut Creative Barbershop, then we had to stay, and we had to, well in the barbershop it's like a...it's like a little apartment on the back side of it. And me and my son had to stay there from...let me see...from January to May? I think it was.

UHC: You stayed there?

Mary: Yeah, 'cause in April I contacted Sherry, and she got me signed up on the homeless program. And it took from April to October before I moved in here. But when I left the barbershop in uh...I left that barbershop in May, and I had to go and stay with my brother, the one that's taking me to the doctor. I had to go stay with him for a while. Then we left from here, and my oldest son, his girlfriend, I stayed with her for about from September until I got this apartment. So it's been terrible.

UHC: It's been awful.

UHC2: What led, if I can ask, to you becoming homeless?

Mary: Really, slum landlords. Because I had rented a trailer over here on down from Ebenezer Baptist Church.

UHC2: Uh hmm. I know exactly where it's at.

Mary: Okay. I was working at 113 [chophouse...??].

UHC2: What were you doing? You were actually working there at 113?

Mary: Uh huh.

UHC2: Okay.

Mary: My oldest son, he was a cook there.

UHC2: Okay.

Mary: And at the time I was staying with my sister-in-law, and, boy she...I didn't like staying with her because she's...well her mother which is my ex-husband's mother, I just

didn't...well, see my mother passed away, and I'm a firm believer in, you know, respect for your parents. And when I was staying with her, see her mother was bedridden---which is my mother-in-law--- and she always she would be fussing at her and cursing at her and if she made a mess in her diaper she'd let it stay on her for a couple of days. And you know just...and she wasn't being half-fed, and she wasn't getting the physical therapy that she needed. So I just couldn't stand it, so me and her had gotten into a bit old thing about this, and she ended up making us leave. Well by that time, I was working at 113. And it just so happened the guy that owned the trailer, well I didn't like the way the trailer was, you know it wasn't in the best of shape, but you know there's a saying "desperate people do desperate things?"

UHC: Right, right.

Mary: Well, I was desperate to get up out of there. And you know, by that time my daughter, the first college that she had graduated from she had just graduated. And she was coming home for awhile, and she needed a place to stay. And see my sister-in-law don't like my daughter you know because they bump heads about her grandmother. It just so happened I seen the guy in the grocery store one day, and I asked him I said, "That trailer [available]?" He said, "yeah." Well, I said, "How much would you charge me to get in it because you know as of tomorrow we're not going to have nowhere to go." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what, give me \$300, and you can move in." Which I hadn't gotten a paycheck yet, and \$300, no \$400 was all I had in my savings account. So I cleared out my savings account just to get the trailer. And when we moved in to the trailer, the water heater busted and got my all my carpet wet. And then when I told him about it, he come in there and put tape around it and patched it up, and then the carpet was mildewing. So when I got my first paycheck, you know, he told me my rent. This is what he told me, he said, well if y'all clean it up and everything because they had dogs, whoever stayed there before had had dogs, and it was a mess. So he said I want \$450 for it which I thought was too steep. "If y'all clean it up you know you can get all of this stuff out of here and clean it up, I'll charge \$300 a month." Well, you know that's cool. You can't beat that. By that time, my daughter had been here for about a week, and she got hired on as a waitress at 113. So she said, "Momma, we can put our money together you know we'll keep the bills up. And we paid him \$300 the first month, \$300 the next month, then he going to jack the rent up to \$400. Then he going to jack it up to \$450, it just kept going up and up and up until we ended up moving. Then I got the trailer over here at Happy Trails. He was charging \$130 a week which was still too steep, you know, because I at that time I wasn't at 113. I was just at the barbershop, and I was volunteering up here at the senior solutions. And because you know when you volunteer you don't get paid, but I like working around the senior people. And that was just something to do to, you know, to do away with some of the stress. I gave the man, we gave him \$260 to move in because the utilities included. Then we gave him the other \$260. You know, he said give him \$260 to move in, \$260 the next time and that was like \$520 a month. That's what he was charging us so we moved in. The first month, you know, we kept, you know, we had the heat on. It would never get warm. Come to find out there wasn't no windows; it was just open space. So I told the landlord about that. So it was about two weeks after that he sent this guy, I guess his maintenance man, which he didn't fix it. He just boarded it up with wood. Okay that's fine. Then come to find out we didn't have no hot water, so

we was complaining about hot water, but I was still paying him the \$130 a week. And so this was like in December I paid \$520, and I paid \$520 January, which is the beginning of this year. And so that next month he sent me a bill for \$835, and so when I called him I said, "How the rate going to jump from \$520 to \$835?" And then he going to send his secretary, which me and her almost got into a brawl, sent his secretary with this long list of paper with the late charges. It's a \$10 every day you late. It's \$10, then it was like \$70 added onto each time. I told him I said, "I'm not paying you." I said, "I give you the \$520 for staying here," which my son kept telling me, "Mom, no. I wouldn't give him nothing because we haven't had no hot water, the toilet had been stopped up, and they had fixed the windows." He said don't give him nothing. But I went on and paid him and he ended up evicting us anyway. It's been stuff that like that you know. It's just been terrible. And see my daughter last time I talked to her, she said, see she's the manager at the SunCom store up in Winston Salem, and she trying to get a transfer down here to, you know they told her that it probably won't be SunCom, but it would probably be Verizon. But she want to keep her same position. And they said if they could they'd try, and she said she'd just go ahead on and move down her. And she said, "Momma, I'll buy a house and you can stay with me or whatever" because it's been terrible.

UHC: It sounds it's been hard.

UHC2: How did you get into here then?

Mary: I signed up, who a friend, this friend of mine named, Dominga, had told me about the Homeless Coalition, and she gave me the number. And I called and talked to Sherry, and Sherry took my application over the phone. And you know, of course, there's a waiting period. I was put on the waiting list. I got moved up pretty quickly, though, because it seemed like the harder I tried the worse it got.

UHC: And you did your paperwork and all that and worked with Sherry and I'm sure she's been very helpful.

UHC2: How long have you been in here, Mary?

Mary: I think it was October 3rd I moved in here, so about two months.

UHC2: Okay. So this is pretty good compared to some of the other places?

Mary: It's a whole lot better. Lot of times people don't even know I'm at home because I hibernate in here. Try to stay, you know, stay away from, I don't know if I'm depressed or not, but just stay away. And my little boy, he's so happy he don't know what to do.

UHC: And he's 12?

Mary: Yeah, he just turned 12, October 13th.

UHC: Well, I'm sure you do just kind of stay in here after all the stress you've been through. And try to have some peace and be peaceful. Well, what do you think, Mary, I know that you're saying your daughter might hopefully be able to move here and get a job, but do you have any goals? What do you want to do?

Mary: I want to go back to school.

UHC: You want to go back to school?

Mary: Uh-huh.

UHC: And what do you want to do?

Mary: My daughter told me to get my cosmetology degree because she got hers. She said if I get my cosmetology degree, she'll open up a shop down here because she's very ambitious. Because with the job that she got, she's a sales representative also, and she travels, and, you know, they might send her to Chicago on a business deal. Then she might like I think in, March she got to go to Pennsylvania, you know, she go to conference meetings and stuff like that.

UHC: But she's the one who might move here?

Mary: Well, I don't think she will. She don't like it down here. I think if she move anywhere, it will probably be Manhattan because she went up there a couple of years ago and did a photo shoot for a magazine. She likes to travel. She got two girls. And she either leave them with their dad while she has to work or she sometimes take them with her.

UHC: But you see yourself possibly as being able to have something steady and a steady income and that type of thing?

Mary: In voc rehab, they had a workshop out there and Mr. [George?] he's, well, I got to go back on the 18th and talk to him. He's going to sign me up with the work program because I was going to go day school, but since he told me I'm probably going to be working over there in the daytime, I'm just going to sign up for night school, and do it like that. Either way, I'm back going to school. Either way.

UHC: That's good. That's real good because your life can become more stable. So you can stay here? This is not a transitional apartment? You can stay here?

Mary: She said we can stay in the program up to two years.

UHC: Okay.

Mary: But I'm going to try to get on Section 8. I think Section 8 is a better program than this one is. Because my son, his aunt, she was on the homeless program, and she got transferred to Section 8.

UHC2: What is Section 8? I'm not familiar with that.

Mary: Section 8 is kind of like HUDD, except they put you in houses. They put her, she got a nice house down in Anderson. But, you know, have to work. They pay a percentage, and she pay a percentage.

UHC2: Okay. Right.

UHC: Do you think, would you say to Dan and myself that you feel like there's a real need in this area for Oconee County to have a facility like we're trying to get built for helping women and children and men in a transitional situation?

Mary: Uh-hmm. (Nods her head.) I hate to see somebody go through this because I was talking to a friend of mine about 2 weeks ago. Well she's staying with her daughter, her oldest daughter, and her and her kids, two young kids, were homeless. And I felt so bad for her. I said to myself, I wish I could help her. But I'm pretty much struggling like she is, and I told her about the Homeless Coalition because, you know, call them and get in touch with them because you never know.

UHC: Anything that you want to ask us? Well, we hope for you the very best, Mary, for healthwise and for your living situation, because I know what you've been through is...we haven't walked in your shoes. It has to have been awful.

Mary: It's bad, but a person by themselves, but it's even worse with a child or two children. It's terrible. It is terrible.

UHC: Thank you so much for letting us take your time.