

Most of the people I know who are experiencing homelessness lost their job, or were laid off, and there was no place to turn. In my case I have no family, both of my parents are deceased. I have a wonderful daughter in college who I am doing my best to help, which obviously doesn't work out as I wanted and that pains me. When you are on your own, you are on your own. And you just do what you have to do or you don't. You need places like Trinity where you can stop, get a cup of coffee, and not look over your shoulder for what is coming next and can relax in a welcoming atmosphere for awhile. And the food is good. Then you have the Rescue Mission where you can go daily. A Church right around the corner from Trinity on Wednesday nights. The Sisters of Mercy three days a week and Prospect Ave on Sunday afternoons. You just have to ask and someone will tell you where there is a good meal. And Sundays at 5 pm you have "Food not Bombs" at the Bus terminal, where they do a vegan meal and bring a lot of fruit, which I like. All from their own gardens.

But you get tired. You are constantly sleeping with one eye open, especially when you are outside. Right now we try to get a hotel room once or twice a week. The rates dropped after Labor Day and so there are places that were \$88 are now \$68 or \$58. The thirty dollars is not much to some people, but it really makes a difference. So we will be able to more frequently find a room. We have talked to a couple of places where it will be \$200 for the week. Your life becomes so much easier, if you have a roof over your head. The whole look on your face changes. You just do not have that zombie look. I got some good work recently. I am putting a house together with plumbing, was asked to put a furnace in, and I am installing a bunch of hot water heaters. I had done some work for an investor recently, and he has been calling me with some small jobs. My prices are low and he likes my work. I always stand by my work and will come back if there is a problem. I am not looking to bilk people. I don't get paid until you are happy.

I had a great handyman service in Englewood, NJ until Sandy hit and I lost everything. I used to work in Englewood Cliffs, Paramus, Alpine and then the hurricane killed me. I was living in Little Ferry and lost everything. When I started my business, I started with nothing but a tool bag. And from there I built it up to where I was making thousands a week. I was a super for two buildings and also had a ton of customers. I was busy everyday. Then I watched a storm

come and sweep it all away. It just took something out of me. Lost my tools, truck and house. I went down to Florida and got hurt there. I was working on trees and when I was coming off the roof of a house, the ladder snapped and I fell two stories and destroyed my left arm, my knee got crushed, along with my shoulder and elbow. My neck had to be rebuilt. I was lucky to be alive and they told me I would never be able to use my left arm again. I use to play the guitar and I picked it up again and just started to do the scales. I got my fingers back working and then got one of those balls and slowly my arm came back to the point it is usable, but I still have trouble with it. I was working for a friend at that time, who only had home owner's insurance, which covered my basic medical expenses, lawyer fees, and hospital fees. I was left with \$20,000 which I gave to my daughter for past child support.

When I got hurt this time up in this area , I got work compensation and then they fired me because I got hurt on their job. I sued and won the case about a month ago. I am waiting for its resolution. They are supposed to pay me 8 month's back pay, fix my nose, and I have a follow up with a neurologist because I get dizzy when I stand up. It was a very bad head injury. I am waiting to hear on all this stuff. The Judge told them to 'settle with this man.' I want to look past a lot of the bull shit and just get my job back. Most people would just not fight back.

So it hurts to be judged. People don't know anything about you and they judge you. Some of the nicest and most lovable people I have met were on the street. They will literally give you the shirt off their back. It amazes me that people who have nothing will help you. We just look out for each other. Maybe it is just safety in numbers. I have given my last dollar to someone who needed it more than I did. We give T-shirts, sweat shirts, and blankets to each other in the cold, and even cuddle up people with us when it gets really cold, as you could not get any sleep otherwise.

People sometimes complain about some of the rooming houses because of bugs, and drugs, and people with mental issues who are placed there by social services who just can't take care of themselves. They just don't know any better. - but if it were not for the rooming houses, people would be on the streets. At least they have a place to go. Everything is clean in many of these rooming houses, but you can't control what happens behind the closed doors of the

rooms. That is where me and wife are now. We just try to find an affordable room for ourselves somewhere and hopefully our nightmare will come to an end soon. Hopefully my business will begin growing again, but a lot has to happen to bring that about. Retooling - getting a truck, etc. which all takes time. Right now we walk a lot wherever we go which just makes life that much more difficult. You just have to find a way to get through the day.

You can't stereotype people. Not everyone is a criminal, a drug addict, an alcoholic and even if they are, not everyone was that way when they found themselves on the street. The stories that you hear are quite amazing. And a lot of little things could be done that would make a huge difference. They close the train station at 3 pm each day. Why couldn't that big open spot be left open longer.? To avoid trouble put a cop there. Right now they are so busy chasing us on the street. If they opened the station they would at least know where we are all at. There has got to be a better way.

P.S. I met Bob and Tara twice this past weekend - the first time early Thanksgiving morning and then on Sunday morning a couple of days later. Both times they were trying to get some warmth after bitter cold evenings on the beach. They were kicking themselves for not being aware of the Cold Blue at Trinity Saturday night. Tara told me how they had try to sleep inside one of the storage bins but when Bob closed the door, she became claustrophobic and they had to sleep underneath the boardwalk for the night.

submitted by Bill Stevens