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Streets Are for Nobody: Judy Silva

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Streets Are for Nobody: Judy Silva

Forty-three years old; working-class family; twice married, five children, six grandchildren. Four years homeless off and on; evicted just before interview, now has apartment.

The movie *The Houses*, you know, it isn't how people lived. They didn't live like that. People live, they live out in the street, they throw a blanket over 'em and that's where they sleep. Ain't no such thing as somebody come and build a little hut for you to live in. No. None a that. I mean, without some help from somebody, people that are homeless are gonna stay homeless. I've been homeless for like four years now. Every time I get a little nest egg set aside, I get a place, well, my income from whatever job I'm workin' don't pay my rent. So I'm back in the shelter again. Like now, I'm back in the shelter again. Again.

I used to do day labor and then I got sick and tired of sitting around waiting to be sent out, you know? You're doin' nothing but wastin' time. And I'll tell you, some of the jobs day labor has — it's one battle after another, you know? And then you find out exactly who your friends are when you become homeless. None of them take you in. Not one of them help you. Not one. And yet soon as they need a favor or something, they're right there at your door lookin' for you to help 'em.

See, with my kids, I understand their point, like my son, he's got five kids of his own, you know? And he's got them doublin' up in beds, you know? So, every now and again, I stay on the couch, you know? My daughter, every now and again, I stay with her.

The other day, I was at her house, you know, I went and saw the kids and everything, I was there maybe two minutes, that's all, no more. My grandson Mark says to me, "Nana, y'all leavin' already?" And he started cryin', didn't want me to leave. When Nana gets there, they don't want Nana leavin', and that makes me feel, at least my grandchildren love me.

[She likes her independence.] You know, a lot of times, a lot of people [get] — what they call — institutionalized? What they mean by that is that they get so dependent on being homeless, you know, livin' in the shelters and livin' that kind of a life, they don't wanna leave. I guess after you do [it] so long, you know, strugglin' trying to get outta it — you just give up all hope. But I got good old Italian blood in me and I'll fight until the day I drop. Catch me bein' institutionalized — baloney! I'm too much my own boss. I don't like nobody tellin' me what to do. ♪

Interviewed by Melissa Shook, April 24, 1990, Chelsea. Reprinted, with permission, from "Streets Are for Nobody: Homeless Women Speak," Boston Center for the Arts, 1991.