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My Life

Thomas Newman

Becoming Homeless

On April 1, 1986 I became homeless when my father's house caught fire. The first two or three nights I stayed in my father's camper and then after that I stayed in the house. At that time I was working 3rd shift in a plastics company. About a week after the fire I bought a car from a friend at work and I lived in the car for about five months. On the night I bought the car I lost my job because I missed a couple of nights of work because I stayed in the house without electricity and I did not have a clock to wake me up at night. One of the reasons I could not get up for work was my father had me helping him take things out of the house during the day and take them to a storage place. When he had me helping during the day I should have been sleeping.

For the five months that I lived in my car I showered at a friend's house and worked odd jobs here and there. In August a friend got me a job at a plastics company working 2nd shift. When I would get off work we would go to a bar to kill time and then about a week later I started to go to a bar to have a few beers before I went to work. Then I would not go to work or I would go in late. Then I ended up getting fired from that job. At the time I was eating once or twice a week.

The Revolving Door

On September 24, 1986 I went to the V.A. Hospital. They admitted me about two or three days later. Someone from the alcohol ward came to talk to me about going into the program. I went into the program for 28 days and then they had me go to a half way house. I stayed there for 30 days and then I left there. Went back to my car and lived there two nights. Then one night my father came by and told me I could stay at his house. That was in December, 1986.

I was getting TDI checks every week. In January, 1987, I got a dishwasher job. A few weeks later I got hit by a car on my way to work. I did not get hurt bad, I just got a cut on my right leg with two stitches. After I left the VA Hospital, I started to drink again and later that night I took an overdose and ended up at the VA Hospital. I was

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there for about a week. When I got out I went to my father's house for a few days. When I went to pick up my pay check my boss told me I was fired.

A few days later, I called my old boss at the plastics company and got my job back. After a week I started to get depressed again and I started to drink again. I was having stomach pains. I went to the VA Hospital. They admitted me for tests. When I got out I went to a bar and ended up back in the VA Hospital that night. About two days later they had someone from the alcohol ward come to talk to me. I went through the programs and they sent me back to the half way house. I stayed there for two weeks and then I left. For about two or three weeks I slept in the streets on a hill near the VA Hospital under some trees.

More Bouncing Around

One night I had gotten drunk and ended up in the VA Hospital and they had the police take me to the Salvation Army for the night. The next day I joined their alcohol program. After a week in the program, my back and hip started to hurt me and I asked my counselor for a job with no heavy lifting. He kept telling me to come to see him tomorrow. After a week of that I left there.

This was at the end of August 1987. I went to Amos House shelter, went to work at a temporary job place. My father found where I was staying at the shelter and called me to tell me I could stay at his house till I could save some money to get an apartment. So I went to his house the next night. After a few weeks I started to get depressed again. I went to a bar and got drunk. When I got home I took an overdose and ended up in the Cranston Hospital.

When I got out I went back to my father's house. That night my aunt called me and asked if I could stay at her house for a few weeks and I told her that I could. So my father took me to her house that night. A few days later a friend of mine told me that where he was working they needed help. I got a job that started the next day, in December, 1987.

I got laid off. I got drunk a week later and stayed in a hotel for a night. When I went back to my aunt's house she told me after New Year's I would have to leave. I went to a shelter and was working at the labor pool. After work each day I would go out to a bar and get drunk. One night I left the bar too late to get into the shelter so a friend of mine brought me to the emergency shelter.

The Beginning of Hope

The next day I went to Amos House shelter and stayed there that night. The next day I went to the emergency shelter because they were staying open 24 hours a day for the weekend. I was going to go back to Amos House that night but I met a young lady with a 4 year old girl and a 2 year old boy. The boy was sick so I stayed to help her with the kids. That Thursday, welfare put them in a hotel for a week. The next day her and her brother came to get me and I stayed at the hotel with them.

There was me, her, the two kids, her brother, her mother, and her mother's husband staying there. After the week was up we went back to the emergency shelter.

We were together for almost one month and I fell in love with her and her two kids. After four days in the emergency shelter they went to Massachusetts. When they said goodbye to me at the bus station I knew I wouldn't see her again. After a few days,

between the depression and her leaving, I started to drink again. I got to a point where I did not care if I lived or died. In fact, I wanted to die at first.

Then in April, when I got \$500 from income taxes. I went drinking till I had no money left. On April 24, 1988, I went to the Benjamin Rush Detox Center for a week. When I got out I went to the Travelers Aid and they put me up at the Salvation Army. They paid for two or three nights. I got a job, started to work, and I stayed at the Salvation Army till I got my first pay check. Then Traveller's Aid got me a room at the Providence YMCA.

For 9 months I stayed sober. My back and hip started to bother me and around Christmas I went into a deep depression and I quit my job. On December 28, 1988 I went to the VA Hospital to try and get treated for the depression but they treated me for alcohol and sent me to another halfway house. I stayed for a week.

Another Downward Cycle

I went to the Welcome Arnold Shelter January, 1989. I met another girl. She was 30 years old and had a daughter and a son. I helped her for a while and Traveler's Aid got her into a women's shelter and a few days later I got an apartment. I was going through different mood swings and on April 3, 1989, I was depressed and got kicked out of the apartment. Rather than to end up in a shelter again I took another overdose and almost died on April 4, 1989. I woke up out of a coma at about 1 p.m. I was in R.I. Hospital.

Two days later they sent me to the VA Hospital. After a week in the hospital all they wanted was to treat me for alcohol so I left the locked ward I was on and went downtown, went to a bar. About three or four hours later the VA had the Providence Police bring me back to the VA Hospital. After that, the VA treated me for the depression. They put me on an antidepressant and a week later let me out of the hospital. I was out on the streets again and had no place to go.

I went into a panic and took another overdose and ended up in the VA Hospital. While I was in the VA I called Traveller's Aid and found out that I could get a room back in the Providence YMCA. After three weeks living in the YMCA, I moved out of there and went to the shelter to try to save some money for an apartment that did not cost so much money.

Coming Together

I was going to the "Housing Now" meetings and rallies and I met someone from Newport. He told me about the old YMCA. In August, 1989, I applied for a room and on September 22, 1989, I moved to Newport and stayed in the shelter. On October 6, 1989, I went to Washington, D.C., for the "Housing Now" march.

On November 20, I got a room in the old Navy YMCA and got a case manager at the Newport Mental Health Center to get treated for my depression. But I kept getting drunk and my alcohol counselor and my case manager wanted me to go into a half way house. But I did not want to go to one, so I told my case manager that I had a week's sobriety and to give me three more weeks to stay sober, and that if I did pick up a drink I would [go] to Benjamin Rush Detox. And in February, 1990, I went to Washington, D.C., for a three night sleep out for the Right to Housing, trying to get the Senate and Congress to pass a bill so that more affordable housing can be built.

I came back to Newport February 14. That Saturday I was depressed. When I woke up I started to drink, got suicidal and the police took me to Newport Hospital. I stayed

there for about fifteen minutes and went back home, locked myself in my room for three days. When I saw my case manager on that Tuesday she asked me if I remembered the promises I made her and I said I did and told her that I would go to the Benjamin Rush Detox Center. I was there for eight days and started Antabuse to help me stay sober. I got thirty days' sobriety. And then I got started on an antidepressant.

I am going to AA meetings and I have a different outlook on life and about myself, thanks [to] my case manager caring about me and making me see that I am not worthless and that I have something to live for. And now I plan to take a course from the New York Institute of Photography and sometime in the future I hope to be a photographer.

Why I Wrote This Story

The main reason I wrote this is to let people know the people who are homeless are not alcoholics, druggies, that anybody can become a homeless person and that there are families out there without a home. There are women and children who are homeless and maybe someday that bill will get passed and then there won't be a need for shelters. ♪