

# Against All Odds



*A Collective Endeavor of Women Who Have Experienced Homelessness*

**Friendship House, Inc., Women's Ministry, 8th & Orange Sts., Wilmington, DE. 652-8033**

## MANIPULATION

I look back at the people in my life, and I can't help but feel witty. I've lied, manipulated and betrayed in the past. In my recovery, I've learned that these were part of my character defects. I always justified these behaviors. I was seeking sympathy and pity from others. In this way, I could get what I wanted when I wanted it. I felt I deserved it. If anything bad happened, it wasn't my fault because the world was out to get me. My manipulation allowed me to control every situation. I thought control was the key to everything. I failed to realize that my actions took that same control away from me. The things I did made my life unmanageable. In my eyes, though, no one had the right to tell me what to do. As my life spiraled downhill, I became completely lost. I hid my emotions, who I really was, in different addictions. Food was my first addiction, then I substituted alcohol and pills. I didn't have the food or weight to hide behind, so I found other things.

Due to my manipulation and lies, I was able to hide my addictions for years. My weight

had led to health problems, so any signs of my addiction were attributed to those health problems. People felt more sympathy for me, and that just fed the whole cycle of self-pity.

Finally though, I hit the proverbial bottom. I lost control of my life, all pride, and my job. The loss of these things barely fazed me. All I could think about was making any feelings go away.

At one moment of clarity, I knew I needed help. I ended up at the hospital for the first time admitting to someone that I was an alcoholic. I begged for help. My pleas landed on deaf ears. Even during my subsequent stay detoxing, my pleas to go to rehab failed.

After getting out, I did take control again: calling, writing, doing everything I could do to get help. I put as much determination in that as I had in my using.

I don't know what I expected, but I soon realized going to rehab was my way of running from who I was and what I was doing to myself. I somehow thought I could manipulate my way through rehab as I had through life. Little did I know that I was trying to manipulate people who had seen it all: other

addicts, manipulators and counselors who saw through it.

I spent the next 5 months, 21 days trying to see me. I had to dig through 30 years of lies and hidden emotions: pain that I'd covered up and fears that I'd denied.

Facing these problems was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I knew if I didn't face it, I would continue to run and hide, resorting to the same old behaviors. The same fight I had put into running and hiding all of those years I now had to put into my recovery. I had to make the choice between recovery or relapse.

I chose recovery. Part of that choice meant turning my control over again. I decided not to go back downstate to a family that loved, but enabled me. Instead, I went to transitional housing. I had gained strength, and I knew I needed the help and support of people who understood me.

Giving up control and old behaviors that I'd lived for so long was necessary for me to live. Over the past 8 months, I've grown finding the person I am, setting up the boundaries I know I need to in order to be spiritually alive. I am learning to live again with honesty, open-mindedness and willingness.

Ronda J.

**MY DEAR ROBERT,**  
*(A letter from a young mother  
to her new born son.)*

I wanted to start off by telling you that I love you. I have so many hopes and dreams for you it's more than I can possibly write. But, I will tell you this; whatever you decide to do in life, I will be there for you two hundred percent. I never want you to feel alone or by yourself, in this world. I want you to know that you have a mother that would die for you. When I look into your eyes you give me hope and strength to keep going in life.

I wanted you to know that when you came into my life you completed me. I want you to remember always to be yourself. I want you to know never to let people get you down or make you feel less than what you are. I want you to go to school and work hard so you can be proud of yourself and won't have to ask anybody for anything. I had you at fifteen years old. Don't make bad choices. I'm not saying that having you was a bad choice; I'm saying I should have waited a few years that's all. I don't want you to have to struggle with growing up early like I did.

I want you to know that you have a wonderful grandmother. She has helped every step of the way. She loves you so much. I tell her all the time that you act just like her. She was even there when I had you. She gave you the nickname Peanut. I want you to know that you have people that love you and support you.

I've made a lot of mistakes and had to learn a lot of things

the hard way. I don't want you to have to. I want you to think before you act and if you're not sure what to do and you need help pray on it. I want you to have God in your life because when I'm dead and gone he will be your constant protector, provider and friend. As long as you believe that you will make it in this life.

I'm going to end this letter just by telling you I love you again and I want you to always try to stay strong. I want you to always be careful because the devil is always at work. I want you to keep a hold to faith even when it seems like it will never stop raining. Always remember the sun will shine. Always remember as long as I am around you can count on me.

Love, Your Mother

## HOW TO GET TO WORK?

Public transportation is a necessity in Wilmington for our clients, and for the most part works fairly well for them. Unfortunately, there are significant challenges when job hours are not coordinated with bus schedules and routes. DART buses stop running in the late evening Monday-Saturday. There is no bus service on Sunday. Here are a few true stories, which illustrate the dilemma and the difficult, but creative solutions some of our clients have found.

Susan lives in our transitional housing and works at a restaurant on Naamen's Road. She works 6AM-3PM and makes \$5.00/hour plus tips. She leaves the North Lincoln Street residence at 5AM, changes

buses, and gets to work at 5:55 if there isn't much traffic or bad weather. That works when her shift falls on a weekday, but on Saturday, the first bus from her home doesn't leave until 25 minutes after she is already supposed to be there. So, she pays someone to take her to work on Saturdays, and to/from on Sundays, which is a total charge of \$45.00 per weekend.

Another client, who lives in the Jane Ashford House, works at a downtown restaurant and doesn't finish until after 10PM on Friday and 9PM Saturday - too late for any bus, so she takes a cab home. A walk from downtown to Union Street is probably a couple of miles and wouldn't be such a bad walk physically in good weather or during the day, but safety concerns keep her from doing that. Each cab ride costs her \$8.00-\$12.00. (Which is over an hour's pay at her income of \$7.00/hour.)

Nicole obtained a job at a store in Prices Corner while living in our transitional housing on North Lincoln Street. Because retail jobs require weekend hours, there were some Sundays that she had to work. She walked to and from, regardless of the weather. She loves her job and now that she has graduated from our program, continues to work in the same place. (She has received a donated car.)

One of the most frequent questions we get while working the desk in the drop-in center is "Where is \_\_\_\_\_?" as a client is reading the want-ads. Finding a job that you like or for which you would be qualified is not as important as finding a job easily

accessible by public transportation.

If you feel so moved, a letter or call to your DE elected representative to encourage expansion of DART's service would be a step in favor of our client.

## I FOUND HELP

Being a woman at the age of 61, I thought that I was secure in my job, until I lost my job through down sizing. For eight months I pounded the pavement looking for work.

By not having any degree it was very much against me and even though I went to interviews another person with a degree got the position and I had to continue job hunting.

I ran into an old friend of mine one day and she told me about this place called Friendship House. I was down to my last wits, so I decided to try the Friendship House.

The people there were very understanding and gave me counseling that helped me to the point where I am now employed, and I have a good job. I would recommend the Friendship House to any woman needing help.

## A BIG BLESSING

Hello my name is Maricruz. I am from Texas. Well the fact is I had no help in my hometown, so I moved up here to Delaware with my boyfriend. All did not go as planned. We got evicted. He went to jail. I was left alone with no one to help. I went to a shelter for a good start. I also arrived at Friendship House. They immediately opened their

doors for help. I really owe them a lot. I had nothing, no job, no family; I was all alone. But things started to get better, I met a woman named Ada who helped me get a job. I had also heard about a cashier training. First I registered for the cashier classes. Then I got a job. I can say this, I was taking classes and working, my schedule was full. It was great to keep me busy. I do believe I got a big blessing because I have accomplished so much. Well now I am certified for cashier and hold a job. I owe it to my mother and little girl, most important God. You know a prayer comes a long way. So to all those that have it hard don't give up. Everyone is strong, we can make it. You can struggle but survive. Just remember a little prayer can get you a big blessing.

## LOOKING AT THE STARS

Before, I was lost. Confused. Nothing mattered. I didn't matter. Life was just what it was. I don't even know if you would call that a Life. I stayed here and there, wherever. The way I lived was the way I was supposed to die. I didn't know there was another way for me to be. The things other people could have weren't things I was supposed to have. I was raised around a lot of negativity- molested as a girl by people who should have cared. I got introduced to drugs early and kept getting arrested. Jail wasn't a "thing" for me. It was part of the only life I thought I could live.

I don't know how I landed in jail last time but now I know it

had to do with God. If I hadn't gone to jail I would have killed myself. There weren't other choices. A lot had to do with not learning- not being able to read. I didn't think I belonged or fit in with that part of the world. It was easier to be on the street because there it didn't matter. I couldn't do anything, couldn't learn things so work wasn't even a choice.

Today, I love myself. I feel proud of myself and I've never had that before –ever. I feel like I fit in. You couldn't look at me now and know I was an addict. I'm scared but I have had a miracle in my life. Where ever I'm going I don't know. I'm just looking at the stars and knowing I'm not going back to what I was. I've learned to make my own decisions. When I'm wrong, I can try again. I've learned that consequences can be a good thing.

Being at the Clothing Bank, I've gotten more "treatment" than I ever got in the system. I learned that women can really care for you and not want something from you. I'm not afraid to ask for help. I know I can learn things. I learned how to work. I used to have a lot of anger. Now I think if I could change the whole world, I would want everyone to be happy like I am. I'm ready to be a parent. My kids are older but now, I can be a good role model for them.

When I got locked up, it was right in front of the Clothing Bank. Today, coming in here is the start of all new things. If I make one person smile today, I feel good. I also learned that on bad days someone here will make me feel better. Before, I thought everyone could have this life except me. Being here, I

learned that I can be who I am and you guys will respect me and encourage me. It's not about a paycheck. It's about belonging here.

## A DIFFERENT PERCEPTION OF HOMELESSNESS

As an intern, I had perceived Friendship House Women's Day Center to be just like any other regular agencies with counselors and caseworkers. I thought, depending on the required qualifications needed for membership or clientele; each woman would be seen on a regular basis for a specified period based on appointments.

Upon beginning my internship at Friendship House, I was open up to a whole new, different, interesting, yet at the same time awesome world. The Women's Ministry has taught me what homelessness really is. I have learned that the Day Center is the first stop for those who have just become homeless, have no idea what to do and the last resort of the chronically homeless, who have burnt their bridges and have nowhere else to turn.

As a Jamaican coming here to the United States of America, with determination I struggled the hardship of equipping myself so as to obtain a job, to keep a job, roof over our heads, food on the table and clothes on our backs. Never have I thought any person in this blessed land was



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homeless or impoverished. This agency taught me what real caring is all about. It's not about pleasing the state, or some big organization with a lot of paper work. It is about doing right by these women and children, keeping them out of the cold, and providing them with goods and services needed for daily survival.

As I move forward into my career path, my expectation is to see Friendship House Women's Ministry, excel over leaps and bounds, as they strive to serve the homeless and impoverished community of women and children in the entire New Castle County. It is my prayer that this agency will get the recognition they deserve, also more support from surrounding churches, families and well wishers. So they will be able to continue this work God has called them to do.

Friendship House Women's Ministry may not be able to save anyone or solve most of their problems, but is there to give assurance that they are for those who need them.

Lorna Miller

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