

## SUCKER-PUNCHED BY LIFE

Stacey's journey from homelessness and addiction to stability and hope is powerful. It's a testament to the transformative impact of faith, compassion, and community support.

For more than five years, Stacey lived in her van, coping with extreme poverty, addiction, and mental health challenges. Caring for her dog, Bella, was all that kept her going. Stacey's life turned into a nightmare that led to losing her sense of dignity and self-worth. Trading pieces of herself to feed her addiction, she deliberately cut ties with her children and everyone who cared about her.

***"I did not want anyone to care about me because I did not care about myself."***

Bella represented unconditional love and gave Stacey her only real sense of responsibility. *"She was everything to me and the only creature on earth I trusted."* When Bella died, Stacey was shattered. When her van was stolen, she was left entirely alone. With no place to sleep and no protection from the weather or other dangers, Stacey remembers, *"My inner faith was literally all I had when a voice whispered, 'Keep going. I love you.' That was the voice of God."*

After years of pushing others away, Stacey found people at Old Town Mission who offered acceptance and encouragement without judgment. She describes her visits to the Mission as being like *"drips of water through a garden hose that keeps it from freezing."* She fondly recalls, *"Kindness and simple things (morning coffee, hot food, showers, and clean clothes) helped restore my dignity, one visit at a time. When I had setbacks, those things helped keep me from 'freezing solid' in my misery. I had felt sucker-punched by life for so long. Acceptance was a beautiful gift that meant something to me when nothing else mattered."*

Ultimately, dealing with addiction and working with mental health professionals helped Stacey process past traumas and gave her new coping skills. Just as she began to nurture her potential, she received the gift of a bicycle in a way that felt miraculous and perfectly timed. With new mobility, Stacey pursued employment opportunities and found her path to self-sufficiency.

Today, Stacey's life is a testament to faith, resilience, and the power of compassion and community support. She has stable housing, works two jobs, owns a car, runs a Bible study, and has reunited with her family, including her four children. Stacey says she no longer feels *"sucker-punched by life"* but clearly understands what it feels like to live without hope. She now envisions a much brighter future.

Stacey's journey shows the importance of meeting people where they are. Wanting to improve is a core human value, and it made a tremendous difference for Stacey when that value was recognized and nurtured by caring people in her community.



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