



Lauren Lovett

"Voices of the Homeless"

Speakers Bureau

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My name is Lauren Lovett and I am twenty-one years old. My life started off fairly normal, I had a mom, dad, two older brothers, and eventually I had a little sister. I was raised in the suburbs of Cincinnati, primarily the North College Hill/ Finney town area. We had the cat, dog, fish tank and a nice big house. Everybody thought that we had the normal Brady Bunch, Cosby family, it really wasn't like that. Once everybody left and the laughter stopped it was a crazy place to live. I had an abusive father, there were drugs used in the household, it was no different that living in what you would call the hood or the projects, the only difference was that we had Caucasian neighbors.

I attended Pleasant Hill elementary until the 8th grade. At the beginning of my high school experience I attended Hughes high school. In 2006, shortly after I started attending Hughes high, my family lost the home that I had grown up in, due to job loss and foreclosure. We started moving around quite often. Because of the lack of stability my last three years of high school I attended four different schools. Hughes Center, Harmony, Colerain and Aiken. After we lost our house in 2006 my parent's relationship started deteriorating, that's when I became homeless the first time. During this time my family was pretty much separated, we tried to reunite during the summer of 2006. Because my parents relationship had begun to deteriorating it just wasn't the same, so my parents separated for good in November of 2007. They eventually divorced, my father was incarcerated I resided with my mother she had become disabled, she was not receiving any disability. I was a senior in high school and working at Frisch's restaurant, I eventually became the bread winner of the household. Because my parent's relationship had deteriorated so much and the divorce was new, I was the person that

my mom took all her pain, resentment and anger out on, it was hard. During that time teenagers my age was worrying about girlfriend/boyfriend relationships, college, friends, the latest fashion fad and what was going on in school. I could only focus on my family; it was a lot of stress on my shoulders.

Before all of this I was a happy person, I did the normal things that young adults my age did. I hung out at the mall with friends shopping. I went to view movies, life was good, and life was fun. At that time I thought that the world was a troubled place with troubled people. My only issues at that time were with-in my family dynamics, I excelled at school and other areas of my life. I never cared about having friends; my focus was going to college. High school was torture; I always had felt that I was more mature than my peer group. It seemed to me that everyone was immature and had child like dispositions. I remember when I was ten years old I got held back a grade. The next school year meant that I would be older than my class mates. During the next school year I distinctly remember saying to myself that they (classmates) were so childish. At that time I felt as if I had been taken out of regular class and put in a play pen, it was tough, I was ready to be an adult to go out into the world and change things, making my life better and the world a better place.

My mom excelled in school also, she is smart and she could spell any word off the top of her mind. I would ask her how to spell a really difficult word; she did not have a problem spelling it correctly. I was more of a daddy's girl; when I was twelve years old my parent's relationship started to deteriorate, at that time I was used as a ping pong ball between their relationship. It was like if my dad loved me or showed me attention, then my mom did not like me. The same was with him, if my mom loved me or showed me attention, my dad did not like me. When they were getting along well, I was left out. I feel that from the age of twelve to twenty I had to pick a parent, it was hard. When I was sixteen I was working two jobs and also attending school. I bought the food I ate, the clothes I wore, and purchased my own school supplies and anything else that I needed. The only thing that my parents had to do for me was to make sure that I had a roof over my head. During those years working was my recreation, I did not attend parties, or go to clubs, those things did not interest me, and I was more of a productive individual. I did and still do enjoy poetry, and sometimes a very small crowd, that enjoys the same things as me. I enjoyed R&B, nineties music, looking at movies. I was more of a laid back person. When I was five years old I wanted to be a doctor when I grew up, as I got older I wanted to be a singer. I remember, in elementary school there was a talent day, I chose to sing one of my favorite songs by one of my favorite artist. I sang that song with all my heart, only no words, or sound was coming out of my mouth, I had lost my voice; that's when my singing career was over.

As I have gotten older writing has become my passion. I find it easy to express myself, my feelings, and how I see the world through poetry. I never had a role model as I was growing up. Most of the people that I knew were dysfunctional, so I focused on the image (vision) of me as I saw myself the way I wanted to be and of who I wanted to be in the future. I do not have and has never had issues with alcohol, drugs, mental health and / or employment. There is a perception that everyone who becomes homeless is because of one of them issues, I became homeless because of other issues. I was working full time and also attending high school fulltime when I became homeless. After my parent's marriage dissolved I shared an apartment with my mom. She had become disabled; I was helping out as much as I could with finances as

well as caring for her personal well being. She came home one day started an argument and decided that she did not want me in her apartment anymore. This was a bad time for me; I was ill with the flu and very weak. I think that at that time I had had enough, because over the years, I had endured a constant barrage of insults and occasions of being belittled at the hands of my mom. I had figured that I was working and going to school, she was not able to do anything, and what I was doing was never enough, or good enough for her. So when she decided that she wanted me to leave, it was a relief, I was not upset, I was ready to leave. I was eighteen years old at that time.

The first place that I went for help was to be a co-worker. She was an older woman; I looked at her as an aunt figure. She knew of the troubles that I had been having with my mom. She told me that if I ever needed help, I could come to her house. She also told me that I would not have to worry about rent and that she would put food in the house. It seemed too good to be true. It felt like a dream, until I woke up to reality. My first day there I found the water pipes frozen, and that there was no water at all, also the heat did not work. Also the windows were not properly reinforced for the winter weather, there were bed bugs on the couch, and she did not live there. I lost about forty pounds that first month of living there. During the process of being thrown out of the house by her son I found out that the house belonged to him, and that he wanted it back. After that I couch surfed around for a while. At this time my mind set was focused on surviving, I did not have time or the energy to feel sorry for myself. I knew that this situation was temporary and that somehow things would get better. I felt that the time I would spend crying or being depressed, could be better spent trying to get myself out of the situation. I focused on being optimistic and keeping a positive attitude. I would often think that "yes I'm homeless, but that homeless person has it worse than me". I always knew that my situation could have been much worse than it had been.

During this time the school that I was attending found out about my living situation, and what I was going through. They informed me about the transitional living program through the Lighthouse Youth Services. I went there to get help, but because I was eighteen years old, I was not allowed to stay there. I ended up at the Drop in Center. December 9th 2008, was my first day at the drop in center, it was a Tuesday. I stayed there that Wednesday night, on Thursday night I stayed at a friend's house. That Friday I received news that I was accepted into the Women's Program at the Drop in Center. That was the beginning of one of the many blessings that I have received during this process. The day that my mom put me out was a cold rainy day; I had on pajamas, one pair of socks, my work and school uniform and a broken umbrella. I did not have anything else for over a month. I called my mom to see if I could come and retrieve the rest of my belongings, she never answered the telephone. I did not call other family members for assistance because I had felt that I could never count on them when I had been younger, and was being abused, so I felt that they probably would not help me now. I was assisted by friends, maybe not the same one all the time, but I did and could count on them for assistance.

I was in the Women's Transitional Program at the Drop in Center for eighteen months; I slept there every night, it was home. I also graduated from high school while living there. After eighteen months, I moved into my own place on campus, by now I was a student at the University of Cincinnati, double majoring. My mom became ill again, and needed someone to care for her. I made the decision to move back in her house and care for her. This time was

different, I wanted to be there and take care of her. The last time I had lived with her I did not have any choices in the situation, this time I did have choices. It was not long before she put me out again; I moved back on campus and made the decision that as soon as I was financially able that I would move into my own apartment. That's where I am today, I just paid two month's rent, and it feels good to have your own. I have had an interesting twenty-one years. I give credit to Faces Without Places, Project Connect, Lighthouse, TLP, the Youth Zone, for them being a support system when I needed support. I think that by me striving for the possible while enduring an impossible situation made the difference in the outcome of my story. It has been an amazing journey. I wanted better and I was determined that I would have better. I did what I had to do to get where I wanted to be in life. Today, I speak to the youth population about my experience being homeless. They do not realize that when you are couch surfing from a friend's house to another friend's house, you are considered homeless. This has been a life's experience, I could not say I would do it over again, but the experience's, good and bad, has shaped me into the person that I am today.