



FALLING DOWN A DAUGHTER'S LOVE

April 23, 2012 10:41 p.m.

Michelle Mayhu's mother faces an eviction that will most likely leave her homeless. And after months of worrying about her mom's health, her mental and emotional well-being, and her finances, Michelle found herself at an emotional low.

"I was desperate," she says about the moment she sat down to her computer and began to compose what would turn out to be 30 emails that she'd send before heading to bed at 3 a.m.

In a heartfelt, one-page message she asked for help from friends, colleagues, and even some strangers. She wrote:

This woman is my hero, and the only family I have ever known. Not only did she raise me as a single mother, never having taken or asked support from anyone including the government, but she did this facing adversity as a lesbian woman.

She wasn't expecting money or any kind of handout, really. These are tough times for people, she knows well. But money is exactly what her mom needed the most. Of all the worries money was at the top of the list.

IN THE CRACK

The messages went mostly unanswered, but she still has hope that their community will reach back with at least some moral support for her mom. Michelle could use some as well.

"I don't understand," Victoria Mayhu, her eyes glazed over and staring at the floor, says.

Victoria, 46-years-old, is sick and unable to work. Within a few days — maybe weeks — she may be on the street. Though Victoria is too ill to work, according to her doctors, she is not officially considered disabled. She doesn't qualify for social security, yet can't collect unemployment as the system requires her to be employable to receive the check. The short-term disability plan she paid into cut her off after just weeks. She lost her health insurance when she lost her job and today her doctors won't see her without it.

"She is stuck in the little crack of the system," Michelle whispers.

Michelle, 26-years-old, has been part of a family of two her entire life. Her mom has always been a hard-working woman and parent; it never dawned on her that she would be worrying about her own mother's welfare at such a young age.

"Maybe at 80," Michelle says. "But not 46!"

The women have a close relationship, warmly recalling a day some years

ago when they came out to one another. They giggle together about that conversation.

A HARD WORKER

Victoria didn't have it easy as a kid. Her father was tough on her, especially after she revealed to him at a young age that she loved a little girl. A classmate with long blond hair, she recalls. Her voice trails off.

Her life changed that day, she says.

"He was pretty horrible," she shudders.

She moved a lot. And trauma, of some sort, clearly left her scarred and scared. She says she ended up fearful of everything. Only her pets, mostly dogs, soothed her fears through the years.

But work she knew. And she was okay with hard work. Victoria speaks of work as almost a utopic escape from life, her eyes brightening when recalling her work history, her responsibilities, and the challenges she overcame over the years. It's who she is, she says.

"Well, it's who I used to be."

While single parenting was anything but easy, being a hard worker made it doable.

She worked in telecommunications until she fell down an unprotected access hole and shattered her shoulder. But she bounced back and, despite any formal training, became a pharmaceutical technician, first in Eugene and then later at the state mental hospital in Salem.

"I've always been the responsible one, the go-to person," she says, wiping tears from her eyes.

She was a tough, working, single-mom, Victoria insists. She was the one who stepped up and volunteered to work holidays. She says she's moral, ethical, and that she has always given 110 percent. She's proud of her former perfect credit and that she got to buy her own home.

Daughter Michelle, now a single mom too, agrees with all of it.

But one day Victoria didn't feel like herself. She didn't feel so tough.

A long series of diagnosis, doctors, specialists, and medications, lead to a sort of perfect, if not irreversible, storm. Victoria was diagnosed with Multi-Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), making working among other people nearly impossible; Myofascial pain syndrome, from her earlier workplace

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