

It could happen to anybody

Ceirah McCauley knew homelessness firsthand, and tells her story of the lessons learned along the way

BY JASMINE ROCKOW
STAFF WRITER

Ceirah McCauley witnessed homelessness early in life. Her grandfather worked for the Portland Rescue Mission and her whole family joined in. When she was in middle school, her experience at the mission inspired her to initiate her own fundraising projects for people experiencing homelessness in Portland and in Haiti.

Two years ago it became more personal. She found herself homeless while attending St. Mary's Academy, a Catholic high school in downtown Portland. She will be speaking about her life at St. Mary's Food for Thought luncheon on Nov. 12. McCauley shares some of her experiences during that time.

Jasmine Rockow: *How did you end up living in a homeless shelter?*

Ceirah McCauley: When I was 15 to 16, me and my mom never got along. My grandma sent my aunt to Harry's Mother for a day, and then my mom found out about the program. It's a teen homeless shelter. She sent me there. It's something you're only supposed to do one time, but she kept on sending me to the homeless shelter. So I was there four or five times, up to three weeks each time.

J.R.: *What was it like there?*

C.M.: They're extremely friendly and really nice. Everyone there is young. So that's cool, but if you don't want to be there, you kind of shut everyone out and don't talk to people. And there's people there that you don't know. I felt like, this isn't an environment that I should be in, because I



PHOTO BY GREG KOZAWA

Ceirah McCauley stands outside her high school, St. Mary's Academy

McCauley will be speaking at the St. Mary's Food for Thought luncheon, 11 a.m., Nov. 12th in the Hilton Grand Ballroom, 921 SW Sixth Ave., Portland

go to St. Mary's and I am a good student. I'm a good person. I just felt like I shouldn't have been in that situation so I was closed-minded. At least the first time I was there, I was very closed-minded. I didn't want to talk to anybody or communicate. But I opened up a little bit more. They have counselors there, and they helped me figure out the issues that I had, find solutions to fix the problems between me and my mom. I didn't like it, but they were really nice. It's a good place to be if you have nowhere else to go.

J.R.: *How did you keep your wits about you?*

C.M.: I talked to all my family members. Everyone was there for me. At school my friends helped a lot. People that knew my life, I could talk to them about the situation with my mom. And the teachers helped. They understood that sometimes I would need an extension on homework, or they were there just to listen. So, having people who wanted to listen to what I have to say, because I didn't have that at home. It helped me stay stress-free and calm. At the end I knew there was something good that was going to come out of it.

J.R.: *Was it hard for you talk to people about the problems you were facing?*

C.M.: Talking to the teachers, yes. I had never been in a situation like that. I have a really big ego and so my pride gets in the way, I don't want people to know that I'm not well-off. I think admitting it to myself, that I needed somebody to help me was the hard part.

J.R.: *Did your experience at the homeless shelter change you?*

C.M.: It changed my attitude a lot. I didn't have a very good attitude at all. So going in there with a bad attitude and seeing that people weren't mean to me and seeing that people were really nice, it changed my whole perspective. You're not going to get anywhere with a bad attitude. Understanding that helped me to be more humble and nice to people. But it did change me a lot, my attitude toward teachers, my attitude toward my friends, adults. It made me forgive my mom for the situation that was going on. Just learning how to love her from afar. So it changed me, in a big way.

J.R.: *What do you think is most important for people to know about homelessness?*

C.M.: That homeless people — they're people — not some people on a different planet. A terrible experience doesn't have to happen for them to be homeless. A lot of people think that it couldn't happen to them. I was one of those people. I thought I would never be homeless and I would never be on the street and have no place to go. But in reality it could happen to anybody. Just because you are homeless, it doesn't make you less of a person, it just means that you are going through a hard time.

Life Thru My Eye\$

by Shanna Robinson

Can you see life thru my eyes?
All she tells me is lies.
She is just trying to get well
To escape this hell.
She's just another dope fiend
caught up in the mix
Trying to get a fix

They say the track
is where she was famous at.
It's just another tragedy
She was caught up in this catastrophe.

First it was the crack
Then it was the black.
Motivation to live is what she lacked.
She let that shit beat her.
It took her to an early grave.

Didn't nobody care
My mother died out there.

Can you see life thru my eyes?

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