



PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

Carolyn Will has her own apartment in downtown Portland. She uses public transit to get to her pharmacy tech job in North Portland.

'Where there's a will, there's a way'

BY REBECCA KOFFMAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Carolyn Will is wearing navy slacks and a blouse, office attire, on her day off. Her long brown hair is streaked with gray, her voice low. She is reserved, reflective and articulate as she describes her journey into and out of homelessness.

Her story is a master class in managing the logistics of living in your car.

In 2004, after she and her husband parted ways in California, she moved to Arizona with her two children. She had been working for many years as an office manager for a health care company when, in 2012, they offered her a job in Portland. It offered better prospects and, potentially, better insurance coverage for a

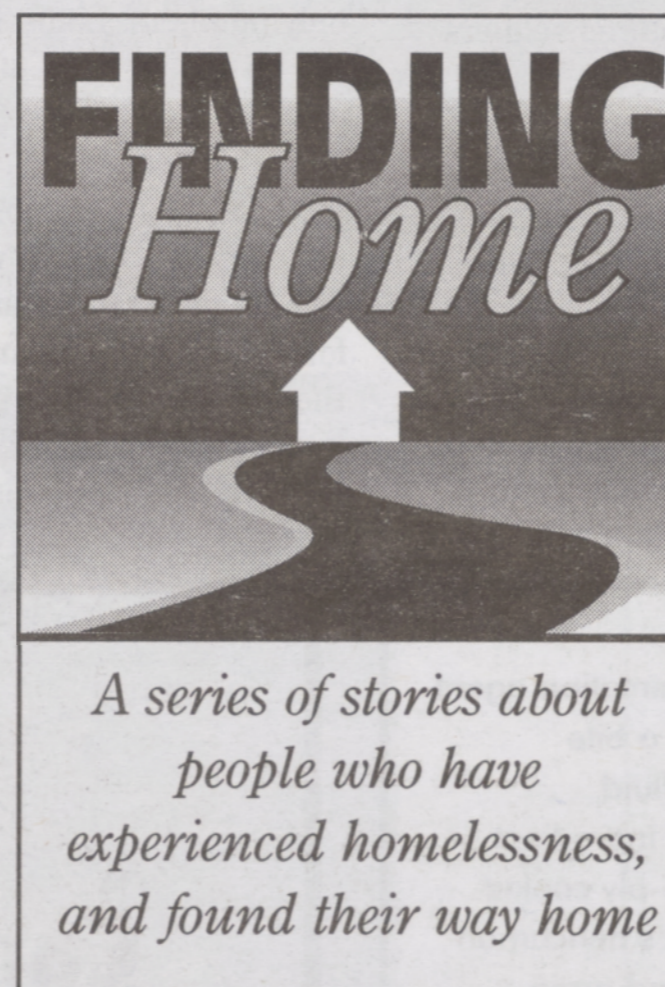
hip replacement she needed and was saving for. Her son had recently gone into the military, so she, her teenage daughter and Pixel, the tortoiseshell cat, moved to Oregon.

They settled into an apartment in Gresham. But the new job proved not to be a fit. "Almost a year to the day after moving, the company let me go."

She collected unemployment and enrolled at Anthem College to get certified as a pharmacy technician. She had one class left to complete when the college went belly-up.

CAROLYN WILL

She spent years managing the logistics of homelessness. Today, she has an apartment in Portland and a job as a pharmacy tech.



"In the meantime, I had lost my unemployment," she says.

So she cashed out her 401(k)s, IRAs and student loans. Eventually, Carrington College picked up those students left in the lurch, and she graduated and got certification with the pharmacy board in February 2015.

One month later, she, her daughter and the cat were evicted.

They spent two months in a room in what she calls "the frat house" – noise, belligerence and all-night parties – before deciding that they could take it no longer.

They moved into her 1995 SUV, a Chevy Blazer with about 250,000 miles on it.

"It was a two-room car," she says. "My daughter got the back; I got the back seat." Pixel the cat soon adapted to living mobile.

"We moved around a whole lot," she says, from parking lot to parking lot: Walmart, Shari's, the library. Carolyn's church gave her a letter saying she had permission to park in their lot overnight.

They were on nodding terms with other families on the parking lot circuit.

Someone told her about Planet Fitness, a nearby 24-hour gym that was running a special: \$20 per month for one person plus a guest.

"I was the cleanest homeless person," she says. She and her daughter showered there every day.

During the day, they spent lots of time at the library. Carolyn was a regular visitor to the local WorkSource office, a resource center for job seekers, and her daughter, who was finishing high school online, often spent the day at the Web Academy.

Carolyn got a three-month gig as a customer service rep, "but they didn't extend," she says.

She wavers, sometimes characterizing her series of experiences as losses and sometimes as adventures. Often she settles for describing, say, the long-ago departure of her husband or the loss of a job, with a small sigh, as "another character-building situation."

Eight times a month, she went to the plasma center. The money she earned as a donor paid for the storage unit where all her family's things were in boxes.

One upside of automobile living: "I lost