

Mighty Mouse & Road Runner

Through thick and thin, Belinda and Karen have stayed friends for more than 20 years, and together they're starting over with a new roof above their heads

BY MAYA COSEO
STAFF WRITER

Karen Flemming, 59, met Belinda Estermyer Beason, 62, at the Wisconsin-based hospital they both worked at 22 years ago. Belinda was new and Karen was the one who trained her. They've been friends ever since, and they have a relaxed dynamic found only among people who have known each other a long time. They even have nicknames for each other, "Mighty Mouse" and "Road Runner." Karen chose "Mighty Mouse" as a nickname for Belinda because "she's strong, for how little she is, she's very strong. That's her nickname, it's Mighty Mouse."

Belinda's nickname for Karen refers to her quick walking.

"I know it's kind of bad to think of it this way, but when she's in a lot of pain, she walks. And she'll walk real fast, to get to where she's going. Then she can sit down, and she can relax," Belinda said.

Health issues started the friends' troubles. Karen worked for 40 years at a hospital until she had two strokes. Then she was unable to work or collect unemployment. Belinda took her in, but only two years later, heavy lifting caused her shoulders to give out. A doctor told Karen that a warmer climate would be beneficial, so they moved to Houston, Texas.

Though they struggled and went to food pantries, they had a place to live in Houston.

"And then when we lost the apartment. The flood," said Karen, referring to the flooding of 2013. "The levies broke down there, a few of them, and it was high in water. We lost all of our stuff."



Karen Flemming, left, and Belinda Estermyer in their new apartment. The two, who have been struggling to find an apartment they could afford for months, including spending months at a shelter, moved into their new home last week. Below, the two tend to dishes. "There's nothing she wouldn't do for me, or I wouldn't do for her, Karen said. "We're that close."



Montana was their next stop because Karen's cousin was there. They arrived to learn that the cousin passed away. Karen's family had not informed her out of fear of damaging her unstable health.

Without the aid of family, Belinda and Karen were left to rely on assistance. "No resources to help us in Montana. I mean, they had a great shelter, but no resources to help, like case management and stuff like that. They just gave you a paper and told you to go see what you could find.

We were getting nowhere. So then somebody told us about here - about Portland," Karen said. Sure enough, the night they arrived, the Salvation Army found space for them in a shelter where they stayed until they graduated to the dormitory.

Even then, things were not easy. Transferring medical and financial records takes time, but was paramount, as both are diabetic.

At this point, the pair met a long-time Street Roots vendor who told them about the job. Neither were interested at first, but desperation changed

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KAREN FLEMMING

gonna take time." Through newspapers and socialization, Karen hopes to help the process.

Another thing the two friends have in common is the belief that kindness and hard work are rewarding, and that diligence brings a better life. They have worked to get where they are, but are grateful for the help they've had. It was a Street Roots customer, Sharon Thompson, who turned their lives around. After meeting Karen and Belinda, she talked to her building manager, Catherine Magdalena, about finding them a place. It paid off. The two recently moved into their new apartment.

"I can't thank Street Roots enough for what they've done for us. We're really blessed," Karen said.

Both women are also thankful for the other aid they have received; their Salvation Army case manager, Cherie Miller, and several local businesses who gave them places to rest, use the bathroom, grab a drink of water and watch out for them.

But it was the Salvation Army, Karen said, that "helped us with getting the apartment. So that I could keep getting the medicine I need."

Karen's health has deteriorated since she has been without a home. In addition to diabetes, she has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, among other conditions. A permanent address will allow her to have the surgeries she couldn't before. Permanent housing will also allow them to explore their hobbies.

Karen wants to continue selling Street Roots and making her area a safer space. She is also interested in doing pottery. At the mention of their new home, Belinda grew misty eyed, clearly excited for the future. She is considering taking weekends off from selling Street Roots and volunteering at the Oregon Humane Society.

Karen and Belinda want their experience to be an example, showing that it is possible to turn one's life around through hard work and respect for others, even in dire circumstances. They focus on living with principle and dignity. "I appreciate (Street Roots readers) coming to get the paper, very much," Karen said. "And let them know that it's nice to care about them as well as they care about me ... once that respect is there, they love us, they appreciate us. And that matters. That matters a lot to me."

Power

by Aileen McPherson

Destroyers seek power through control,
Dominating, manipulating oppressions
By way of earning trust,
Lull you in with twisted lies draining,
Draining lives until only feral shells are left behind.

Creators seek power through change,
Many times destroying the old, rebuilding,
Strengthening, caring about actions of self
Affecting others' well-being, seeking to uplift
Nurturing souls creating compassionate unity.

What is Power? Knowledge

To know the differences between the two,
Maintaining balance in mind and body,
Experiencing the whole before judgement's made.

We are the controllers of our lives
Creators and Destroyers walking a fine line.

Signs of the Times

by Brandon M.

The cat cleans her face
on the colorful quilt
by the fountain whose mortal
waters are spilt

The leaves on the tree
are sad with these times
no one noticing their efforts
to beautify our lives

The serpent is in exodus
from the boomtown
being driven into where
no one wants him around

The eagle agrees
to let him pass
because in this day and age
that's the only hope he has