

Sobriety at Simonka:

The redemption story of Laura Hammack



Laura Hammack works the front desk of Simonka Place on Jan. 28 as part of recovery in the New Life Fellowship program. Photo by JOEY CAPPELLETTI of Keizertimes

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI
Of the Keizertimes

It wasn't Laura Hammack's first time in the hospital. A decades-long drinking problem had resulted in four hospital scares in the past. But the emergency room visit in September of 2020 was different.

Hammack had been rushed to the hospital after breaking three blood vessels in a drinking accident and doctors had been unable to stop the excessive bleeding.

"I just recall being in this very small little room with like 15 people," Hammack said. "And I could feel when I was going to gush out more blood and I would be apologizing profusely like I had control over it."

As more and more of her alcohol-thinned blood spilled from her body, Hammack began to accept that her years of drinking may have caught up to her.

"I just remember laying there thinking to myself, 'I wonder if I'm dying,' I'm getting rid of all this blood and I wonder if this is what it feels like to die," Hammack said. "And I thought, 'I sure hope so.'"

'All of it started crashing in on me.'

Raised in San Francisco, Hammack was hired out of college as a secretary at Bank of America. For 13 years she climbed her way up the corporate ladder, eventually becoming a supervisor. She was hired away by the Intel Corporation where she worked for over a decade.

"During my Intel years, I was raising three teenage stepchildren with my then husband. At the same time, I was rising at Intel and the stress of my job was

changing. I was traveling a lot. I wasn't home very much," Hammack said.

"My use of alcohol had begun steadily increasing and eventually, all it started crashing in on me," she added.

Hammack divorced her husband in 2000 and soon after quietly resigned from Intel. Her personal and professional life having both been severely impacted by drinking, Hammack entered her first residential treatment in 2003. She relapsed after 30 days.

In 2004, she tried residential treatment once again after spending a night in jail from a DUI. This time, the treatment was successful. She began going to Alcoholics Anonymous and even got a job as a drug and alcohol counselor for Bridgeway Recovery Services in Salem.

In 2012, after eight years of sobriety, she relapsed and was fired from her job at Bridgeway.

"Recovery will always be open ended," Hammack said. "A glass of wine here, a glass of wine there, and you're right back to where you were."

Having battled alcoholism for most of her adult life, Hammack felt there was "something was missing" at residential treatment centers. She decided to give faith-based recovery a try.

Hammack checked herself into Simonka Place in July of 2020.

Located in Keizer, Simonka Place is a faith-based women's shelter that provides both short and long-term recovery services. Union Gospel Mission operates

Simonka Place in addition to a men's shelter in Salem. The New Life Fellowship program, which Hammack was attempting to enter, is a substance abuse recovery program.

After close to a month in the program, Hammack was dismissed for bringing alcohol into the shelter.

A month later, Hammack made her fifth, and final, trip to the hospital. Covered in blood, with her chances of survival decreasing by the second, Hammack didn't care if she lived or died at that point.

But something happened as she laid there, something that she wouldn't fully understand until later.

"I turned my head on the pillow and, at the time I didn't know what it was because I was kind of dazed, but there was just kind of like this white ghostly figure. I just looked at it and it didn't move. But I could just make out an arm raised up over me, almost pointing at me," Hammack said. "There were no words said, but I know there was something else present."

Hammack survived and four days after being released from the hospital, she began drinking again.

'Scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight.'

In just over a month, Hammack will graduate from the New Life Fellowship program at Simonka Place. Sitting in a Keizer coffee shop, she recites her favorite Bible verse.

"At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight," reads a passage from Acts 9:18. The verse is about the sudden clarity that Apostle Paul has with Jesus.

Hammack's "scales" began to fall a week after leaving the hospital. She had relapsed and was drinking all day, every day. She received a voicemail from DeDe Hazzard, a supervisor at Simonka Place, asking for her to return to the shelter.

"When I heard that they wanted me back, I started to cry," Hammack said. "And that was when I made the association of the vision of Jesus in the hospital and that phone call. He speaks through other people."

On Oct. 1, 2020, after a weeklong detox, Hammack entered into the New Life Fellowship program. Over the next 16 months, she would slowly work her way

