

Absence of Tears - The Women

The Choice

How, when, where, and why do you make the choice to be homeless? If you are a woman caught up in an abusive relationship, you might choose being homeless as the preference between two evils. If you are part of middle America, living from paycheck to paycheck, you could be thrust into homelessness by a company layoff. If your life has been dependent on government programs, you could accept homelessness as an extension of what you already have. If several life-shattering things happen at once, you can be pushed into no place to exist almost overnight. If you are a single parent with no extended family, an illness might be the deciding push over the edge.

Whatever the reason for homelessness might be, the reason for entering a shelter for women and children is basic. It is simply a Time Out remedy... a breathing spell, an attempt to reconnoiter. When you check in a shelter, a counselor makes it very plain that this is not a permanent solution to your problems. The limit for a stay at our shelter was 30 days, although unusual circumstances might prolong the time. This place is not restful, not luxurious, nor is it desirable. It is simply a chance to try to get your life together and map out a plan to move on. For just a little while there are no food bills to pay, no rent, no utilities to worry about. For just a short while, a woman can concentrate on putting her life together. She can plug into the system that will help her with food stamps, subsidized housing, free basic medical care, and clothing for her family. She can try to get back on her feet.

For thirty days she has an address and free local telephone service - very important if you are trying to find a job. Sometimes there are bus tokens available so you can find your way around a little easier. If you find a job, you might be able to arrange child care with another woman at the shelter. It is a trade-off. Women who find a job quickly might have a week or two of low overhead. There probably won't be time to save any money, but it might help accumulate a month's rent for a place where you can talk the landlord into spacing deposits over time. Many times women meet in