

*Homeless Hearts: Life Stories of Women in a Homeless Shelter*

In this revealing book, Dr. Jean A. Newsome interviews twelve homeless women who are residing in shelters. Each woman talks about her childhood, relationships with family and friends, marriages and children. At the end of their life story, they discuss who/what had the most positive and negative effect on their lives. Finally, they explain where they see themselves in a year. Each chapter ends with a section called "From her heart," which is a copy of a sheet each woman fills out, asking her to answer such questions as what "happiness is" and what "beauty is." The unique handwriting and answers demonstrate the personality and humanity of each of the women. At the end of the book, Newsome provides an update on the women's wellbeing three months after their interviews.

The book's greatest strengths lie in the patterns of the women's lives. Parental neglect, domestic abuse, and sexual assault are themes that repeat themselves. A cycle emerges and the reader is able to understand how and why this happens so often. The role of parents, particularly of the mother, is prominent in many of these stories. Most of these women had physically and emotionally abusive mothers. A few of them had to care for their siblings because their mothers neglectful. Because of their upbringing and position in life, the women that did have children tended to become neglectful mothers themselves and acknowledged their lacking abilities as parents. When asked about what they wanted in the future, most of the women mentioned reconnecting with their children. Some of the children of these women also ended up in poverty, like Tamara, a homeless woman who prostituted with her daughter. While all the women who were mothers cared deeply for their children, they did not have the experience and resources to be good mothers and perpetuated the cycle of poverty.

Sexual assault was another common occurrence for these women. Seven out of the twelve women were raped at some point in their lives. Four of these women were raped/sexually assaulted as children, typically by a family member. Eva was raped at the age of seven by her step-father. Candace was raped by her uncle when she was twelve. Tracey was raped by her grandfather when she was twelve. From these stories, the reader is able to see how such experiences contributed to their homelessness. A few of these women developed psychological disorders and/or substance abuse problems later in life, which some doctors thought was influenced by their childhood incest. The other women who were victims of sexual assault as adults tended to experience severe violence. Lillian was raped for hours and then had to be taken to the emergency room where she received switches. While they described their rapes during the interviews, all the women had extreme emotional reactions. When Dr. Newsome asked them what the worst event in their lives were the majority of the women who experience sexual assault stated that was the worst event in their lives.

Domestic violence was also a common experience among most of the women and, unfortunately, they tended to experience this multiple times throughout their relationships. Georgia was the victim of domestic violence throughout her life. In her most recent occurrence, the violence was so severe that she suffered a stroke and now has a permanent slur when she talks. Kelly was also a domestic violence survivor. Kelly's second husband, who was an alcoholic and drug addict, pushed her through a glass coffee

table and threw a telephone at her head. The police were never involved in these situations so the abusers were never arrested.

Five of the women were put in jail for misdemeanors. Three of them have psychological disorders such as Mary, who has Delusional Disorder, Anne, who is bipolar, and Valerie, who is a paranoid schizophrenic. None of the women received any help or counseling while in jail.

Consistently, the women voiced how thankful they were to be in the shelter. Many had found a supportive system and finally felt safe. Many were close to their counselors. Each expressed a desire to have a home and start work, but unfortunately after three months Dr. Newsome found many had not been able to achieve this goal.

Dr. Newsome's interviews reveal a world of violence, addiction, and poverty so the reader is able to empathize with these women. Through these interviews, one can understand how easily it is for people to become homeless and how difficult it is to recover from poverty. Dr. Newsome has given a face and a voice to homeless women. Hopefully, some people will listen.