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Finding Home

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Finding Home

Throughout a typical lifetime, the average person faces several different obstacles, some of which may be more significant than others. For me, the most significant of these obstacles has been poverty and, more specifically, the living circumstances that poverty (and a slew of terrible landlords) has forced me and my family into. By no means do I wish to complain, for I know that it always could have been worse. I simply mean to share some of my experiences.

Our tale begins in the year 2009. My mother had just realized that the horrible skin breakout I had was caused by the flooding in our basement, and the subsequent forest of mold and fungi that grew around our ventilation system. In the middle of our moving process, the landlord got a bad attitude about the terms of our evacuation and changed the locks, putting some of our things on the street to be taken by curious passers-by. In August, we moved into a new house, where I was far enough from my school to be at risk walking to and from school alone, but just close enough to be denied free bus rides. Mother couldn't afford the bus bill, so I made the walk throughout one of the coldest Illinois autumns ever. And I didn't like our house. There was something weird about it, and I never felt safe.

Right after Thanksgiving we noticed a strange smell in the house. But it wasn't until the electric iron smoked and burned that Mother decided to check into things. Apparently, the house had terrible electrical fires within the walls, and was basically slowly burning around us. So Mother took the landlord to court for lying and putting us in danger, and then ignoring our complaints. The judge's verdict? Move out in two weeks. That was our "justice", and with our income level there were no houses that we could afford. But there was no lenience. The landlord

said she needed us out so she could make the necessary repairs to the house. But no sooner were we out than another family was moving in.

We were staying with my aunt, so that I could ride the bus to school with her son. The majority of our belongings were in storage units. We were paying my aunt so much that it would have been cheaper to stay in a Motel 6, but Mother insisted on being there so I could ride the school bus. Two weeks before Christmas, my aunt told us that her friend was coming into town for the holidays, and she wouldn't dare let him stay in a hotel, as hospitable as she was. She wanted us out before he got there, and gave us three days. So, still having found no house, my mother and I hesitantly asked another aunt, who lived across the street from my school, if we could stay with her until we found somewhere to go. Of course, there were more exorbitant payments to be made, and we were under a lot of pressure because we knew she didn't want us there at all. Hurriedly searching for a house, we were pretty desperate. And for good reason, seeing as the new arrangement lasted only three days.

Then, we were ousted again. Believe it or not, we had gone to the kindest, most generous relatives we had, and there was no one willing to let us stay with them. But Mother works the occasional miracle. She found this little house that had been abandoned for months. It had electricity and running water, although it was pretty poorly insulated. It was better than freezing outside. So that's where we stayed. On Christmas Day, my brothers, as financially challenged as we, made their way back into town, to that little house, and gave us gifts. I got my first mp3 player, which was the best gift I'd ever gotten. Then, with the help of their significant others, they treated us to IHOP. For being a "homeless" Christmas, it wasn't really that bad. The owner of that abandoned house walked in on us, and coincidentally he'd gone to high school with my mom. He said that he had a house that was almost finished, and if we would move into and rent

that house when it was completed, he would let us stay in the empty one until the other was done. So we made a deal, and we had ourselves a house.

On December 28th, 2009, we gathered anyone willing to help, got our things out of storage, and started moving in. It was an icy, rainy day. Of course things didn't go smoothly, because the helping relatives weren't working for money. But we got our stuff out of the house, albeit after an unnecessarily long time, including several arguments and complaints. The house was very tiny and poorly put together. The plumbing failed all the time, even when we could afford to pay the water bill. The insulation could have been better, but it could have been worse. The walls were crumbly, and over very little time they grew full of cracks and saggy spots, as if the walls couldn't handle the weight of the house.

I graduated from eighth grade that May, and got accepted into the International Baccalaureate program at Richwoods High School. I would be getting a great education, on the complete other side of town. So, I rode the school bus whenever I could. It was a very long ride, and some of the kids on my bus would say, "If she lives way down here, why doesn't she just go to the *ghetto* school." The regular school days weren't a struggle, but being as active as I am, there weren't many "regular" school days. I typically had to catch the earliest city bus, for drill team practice. After school and on Saturdays when there were things I had to do, none of my friends were willing to assist me in getting home because their parents "don't think it's safe in that part of town." or "it's just too far away." I alternated between taking obscenely late buses and, when that wasn't an option, begging relatives for rides. Mother and I typically had to pay twenty dollars if we wanted someone to bring me to or from school, which was just barely cheaper than a cab. So I walked a lot, telling Mother that I had a way home so that she wouldn't flip out.

I made it through high school, even though it was stressful and sleep depriving. I graduated second in the class and got a Presidential Scholarship to Xavier. In fact, I made it through all of the things I've gone through, much thanks to my Mom. I feel as though I have overcome a great deal, being only eighteen, and there were plenty of things I haven't mentioned here. But I have yet to overcome the greatest obstacle, because although I made it out of the depths of poverty for two semesters of the year, Mother still lives in that horrid house. And until I have gotten her out, I cannot be truly rid of the choking clutch of destruction.