

The dignity of Angie

"I experienced an internal feeling of emptiness, an aching that at times felt like it would never, ever go away. It was like a living puzzle." These words expressed by Angie gave me a sense of what homeless people feel like. The way they feel inside, the hardships they go through, the pain, and like Angie stated, it was like a living puzzle. A puzzle? A puzzle can take one day to solve, maybe even 3 months, or even years. Angie did solve and put together that puzzle, and did it with great dignity.

As a young child Angie became aware that she was a creative person when she was just a child in school. She states, "I recall the feeling of connectedness with my inner, personal world and the feeling of being at peace with myself, of being able to use what I had available to express my inner vision." Angie was and is still that person. It amazes me how Angie who as a little girl found that creative side to her and learned how to express it. That takes great dignity to do and it was done even when her parents were not the best of parents. Her parents expected a lot from Angie even as a little child. This reason may have caused Angie to experience her, 'psychotic episodes associated with manic depressive illness.' That she later had to face in her life. Angie's mother loved to sew, and she taught Angie to sew. When Angie would sew something, her mother would just rip it up. Angie worried that everything she would do, "would never be good enough," especially for her mom. Her father is somewhat more complicated, I don't think Angie understood him that well "I sometimes feel that emotionally I'm balancing between their lessons of Okay/Not Okay." Or simpler, lessons of Right and Wrong. That's how Angie felt about her parents. You either do it right or else it's wrong. Angie's mother died in 1988. Angie reconnects with her mom's spirit, when she visits the Textile Museum instead of the cemetery where her mom was buried. I guess Angie never really said good-bye to her mom, maybe that's why she feels uncomfortable to visit the cemetery. "I see now that I am a lot like her." "I have that same courage to endure."

Like most homeless people, Angie was abused as a child. She was abused by her step cousin. She is still confused and asks, "What did I do to make him do that?" She was very confused at that time and used food as an expression of the confusion and rage, because of that incident. "Food became a very immediate sort of way to distract and medicate myself." Her brother, mother, and father were all addicted to working, and Angie was addicted to food. She was at a very low point in her life. But there was more to come. Angie got married because she was pregnant with her first child, which she calls, "the girl." And then from there she had to drop out of high school during her senior year. Angie's baby died from congenital defects half an hour after her birth. At this point you can say that Angie has been through hell, and she has. Angie got pregnant a second time, but this pregnancy was much different from the first. She delivered her second child in the back of a taxi cab car. She tells this story because it made a difference in how she felt as a human. She was able to give birth to the child almost unassisted, and with any drugs. She later had her third child, now she has two sons. "I think childbirth toughens a woman in some

spiritual, unseen way." I felt that if I could survive that experience, then I could survive anything." There were more experiences to come and Angie did survive them.

Angie later found out that she had breast cancer in 1973 at the age of 33. The doctor's suggested that she check into a hospital to have a biopsy. She went through a surgery called a radical mastectomy. From that she suffered from severe radiation burns that caused infections. She later had six skin graft surgeons to repair the damage to her chest and armpit. She was hospitalized for six months, and lost the use of her right arm. From that part of her story I feel that Angie had been victimized, by possibly a lousy procedure done by the doctor's. All the radiation and all of the grafting damaged the nerves in her armpit. Angie has what is called a brachial plexus injury. Angie was a very depressed person after this occurred. Since the operations in 1974, Angie has been permanently disabled. During this time Angie missed her two sons a great deal, and so did the kids. Angie was very close to her kids. "My sons and I had to make it the best way that we could on what little we had coming in." To me her sons were like her motivation, she had to live for something, and she survived and lived for her sons.

Angie suffered from manic depression disorder. Angie is now been in therapy for awhile. That takes much dignity to overcome such a serious disease. Most of Angie's dignity came from her will to over come breast cancer, to use her left arm since her right arm was now permanently disabled. Angie taught herself to write with her left hand, and is becoming a better writer. Angie talks a lot of God. I admire that about Angie, she kept her faith in God even when things were not as she wanted. She kept that faith and trust in God knowing that things at the end would work out right. That strong belief in God show's Angie's dignity.

Angie's drive and courage helped her to master the use of her left hand. " Writing is a way for me to clarify and organize some of my thoughts and feelings about my life and healing process." Angie started to do more creative writing mostly in poetry. Writing is what keeps her depression away after becoming disabled, and once again Angie has found that creative person in her, just like the creative person she found as a little girl. "I have in a sense, come home into my own serenity and peace." And that's what I admire so much about her, she found her sense of serenity and pace, throughout all her hardships. This to me, clearly states and means that Angie was able to obtain and maintain that dignity.

Just imagine, having to go through all of Angie's ordeals as a child, and as an adult. With such things as abuse, feeling unwanted by your parents, unwanted pregnancies, depression, and breast cancer. And being able to overcome them just as Angie did. Angie has made and solved the puzzle of her life. Everything she encountered was one piece of the puzzle. Angie knew where those pieces belonged, and she knew what to do if any of those pieces did not fit. Angie created a life she may not be proud of, but at the end, she knew she lived it with great and deserving dignity.

