

They Teach Me So Much!

I had the most amazing Christmas. I didn't spend it in Florida or get expensive gifts. My Christmas cards didn't even get in the mail but this Christmas was one of the best ever. I had two parties to attend before I even got to our huge evening family celebration.

One of the parties was hosted by a friend who has moved to Wheeling from out of town. She had an open house and everyone was welcomed. Community leaders, my homeless friends, and many others were in attendance. On that special day everyone had an opportunity to be at a home for Christmas.

I also was invited to spend some time at The Community of Joy's all day celebration held at the First Presbyterian Church. It was a precious time as well. Spiced tea and coffee aroma filled the air. The love of Christ was apparent as everyone was welcomed into a place of warmth and acceptance. They too wanted to assure that nobody was alone on this special day.

When I arrived at my sister's home I was surprised to find her tree uniquely decorated. It was adorable. Red and green socks were clothes pinned to the branches. My family had put them there for me to share with my homeless friends in the coming weeks. They know that outreach to the needy has become one of my main focuses. I just never stop talking about it-partially because I am in "Shock."

When I began volunteering at the Winter Freeze I didn't expect to find some guests coming in for a few hours of sleep after working long shifts or others wanting early wake up calls for work. Some even walk long, long distances just to find shelter after work. It is hard for me to wrap my head around "working and still being homeless." Rent has doubled in our area and rooms are being rented for what entire apartments rented for a few years back.

These individuals are lucky to shower once a week. They wash the best they can in a sink. Keeping uniforms clean is a real chore too. They have to commit so much mental energy to just mere survival. The rest of us just take this for granted unless for some reason we too have frozen pipes or poor heating in our homes. The causes of homelessness are endless. Physical and mental illnesses, divorces, abuse, lack of family support, fires, job loss, trauma, and other circumstances are often identified as causes.

State identifications or drivers licenses are often taken for granted too. There are endless hoops to jump through. Birth certificates, marriage and divorce papers, proof of residence, and social security cards must be found or copies must be purchased. Finding a ride to Moundsville isn't easy either. This ID problem can interfere with all sorts of things: employment, housing, health care, etc. An ID is even required for admittance to many shelters. Fortunately agencies can sometimes assist with this, but it can be a long process. Sadly many give up hope and see an identification as out of reach.

I've met a few who others owe two or three thousand in court costs. To these individuals these amounts may as well be a million dollars. Until a miracle occurs they are stuck.

As you begin the New Year I encourage you to adopt an attitude of "GRACE." We never know what our co-workers and those we pass by are experiencing. It is a time to develop an attitude of gratitude as well. Meeting these new friends has caused me to complain a lot less and to not take anything for granted. It has taught me to think before discarding items. My new friends have renewed my desire to volunteer too. They count on you and me. Remember - as we bless we are blessed.