

Homelessness traumatized me— homelessness fucked me up. There are physical health consequences I still live with like the chronic UTI. But homelessness broke my heart in new ways. Abandonment got a new name. It wore me down past my minimum.

I emotionally invested in some ridiculous places, after landing in community in Eugene. Looking back I marvel— why did I believe that unavailable man ever could have committed to me? Things I did for safety, I can see now— they made no sense. I was stuck half in a dream, not yet recovered my senses.

I was wrong about home. I was trying to create home in places and people that I now understand were impossible.

It's been three years that Ming and I have been consistently housed indoors, and I'm finally feeling baseline safe. Homelessness tore me apart. I had to rebuild myself. I'm a different person now.

It sounds dramatic, but my culture abandoned me. My family of origin abandoned me. There was freedom, having no home to lose. I learned things I never would have learned otherwise; for that I will always be grateful. But it was wrong to endure that without my choice. It wasn't ok with me.

shame

My mystery of time means at the beginning of homelessness, we didn't know how long it would last. I thought it might be a few weeks— if I'd known it would be more than four months, I would have done things differently.

Friends might have done things differently too. Shame is part of it—I was ashamed of my apparent failures which got me in that position, ashamed of what I needed. Friends might have been ashamed for not offering more.

It's hard to face the emotions directly while enduring the

physical realities of homelessness. I couldn't show up for myself emotionally when meeting my basic needs took up all my energy.

Where are we sleeping tonight?

Where is my next meal coming from?

Should I be searching craigslist right now for inexpensive temporary housing?

Is it ok to cry in the library?

Do I have the emotional strength to try calling services again today?

What should I wear to the community interview?

community

We visited communities in the Bay Area and had an interview at a place in San Francisco that I still think about sometimes. What would our life be now, if we had said yes? That weird dinner, the surly teenager, the power couple who obviously ran the place, the scared looking young people who seemed part of the revolving door crew, and a poet-elder who was on his second stay and maybe needed help escaping.

I remember the backyard tour, beautiful roses, and comparing the available rooms—what the man boss was saying, vs what was actually happening there. The utopian narrative vs the garbage-strewn reality, as community often is.

sugar

We stopped by a late night donut shop after our interview dinner, and I remember the surreal feeling of, "This could be the donut shop I pass by daily if we end up living here." There was a giddiness. We could walk to that huge park whenever we wanted. Yes, it's a lot of traffic, but it's San Francisco—we could do anything here.

"How did that go? Did that go well? Did you like those people?" I asked Ming. I tend to feel a lot of skeptical "hell

no," while Ming is a yay-sayer.

Ming had history with the man boss at that house, and it wasn't entirely good. Decades-old beef about a mutual anarchist friend— not really Ming's drama, but you know how people associate you with something, and that's hard to shake.

disability in community

I had stimmed a little bit at the dinner, just slightly swaying. The boss lady looked at me sternly. Yes, I'm the swaying kind of autistic; I thought it was subtle. What if my physical honesty was charming? You know, probably not.

Deviation from the norm is so suspect in community at the interview stage. My fatness is enough. The funny way I go up and down stairs due to hypermobile joints. Maybe the way I look at you—my word choice. Some of the words are weird, I admit. I laugh at the wrong times. Anyone looking for cracks in my normalcy is going to find them.

Some people like the quirk—my friends love me as I am. Community bosses are scared of letting in bad people who are hard to push back out. Even a shadow of a question can be too much.

This power couple was looking for new housemates who would believe in the dream enough to help put in a new water heater and do their chores, but not believe in the dream so much that they called out the injustices and took over. There's a specific range of care.

Community bosses often look for people they can control. I'm sorry that's true. They search for a follower who will help out while keeping their head down, accepting the status quo.

where to sleep

I don't remember where we were sleeping that night. A lot of that time is a blur now. By the end of our four months, I

realized we were good at being homeless and I should write a book. I learned how to make all our cooked meals in a crock pot when we had electricity. There were delicious soups. I had my traditions, like biting the ends off carrots and breaking them in half.

Homelessness was life without a cutting board. We made do with little, in constant motion. I couldn't process what was happening to me because the next experience piled on top of it. I couldn't rest in a safe home and stare at the wall for a while. The unprocessed experiences turned into a kind of poison.

Safety was a rare feeling. I found it hugging Ming, in prayer, writing a poem, telling the truth.

When Ming and I finally landed in Eugene, I remember sitting on the couch at our housing co-op, silent and wide-eyed, shocked to have a couch to sit on. Is this really home? Will it be taken from us? Homelessness broke me, and I glued myself back together only recently. One way it changed me is that I'm more curious than ever before.

If anxiety is the tension between what's really happening vs what I'm supposed to pretend is happening, it helps to tell the truth. My culture abandoned me, and I will never forget how that feels. So I'll never stop fighting for others who are abandoned also.

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