



Anna's Story

It's hard to believe that the laughing, articulate young woman on the other end of the phone — the one who just handed her daughter to her husband so she could finish being interviewed — was, not long ago, a homeless teenager living near the U-District.

Anna left her home at the age of 16 and headed to Seattle on her own. “My parents were preoccupied with their own lives,” she says. “My dad was a coked-out drunk. Believe me, the streets were a lot friendlier than my father.”

Living on the streets, Anna lacked even the most basic supports — she admits that she had nowhere to eat, sleep, or even go to the bathroom. She somehow discovered Street Youth Ministries (back then just known as “U-Pres”) and found a community of people who cared about her.

“What I remember is that when I was there we had so much fun!” Anna laughs. “You listened to what we wanted to do, and you did it with us. You helped us get away from the idea that we were living on the streets, that we smelled bad.” One of her favorite SYM memories involves the making of “junk art” — tearing apart toys and gluing them back together (an activity that continues at SYM to this day).

Making a decision to permanently get off the streets was not easy. “I would leave, and then I kept going back,” she says. At one point she left Seattle altogether and spent time hopping trains, traveling, and “getting lost in the mountains.” She became heavily involved with drinking and drugs, but began seeing the consequences of those behaviors. “All of my friends kept dying — everyone was dying, just dropping off the face of the earth — I couldn't handle that anymore. I decided I didn't want to die because I had too much life left to live. And so I got off the streets, and that was that.”

She got sober, went back to school, and earned a degree. When asked what she's most proud of, Anna doesn't skip a beat. “I'm proud of my daughter(s). I'm proud I made it off the streets. I'm proud that I didn't die.” She pauses, “A lot of people don't make it.”

SYM provided food, hang-out space, and community during a time in Anna's life when she needed those things. But more than that, SYM provided a place where she could be herself. She laughs as she remembers: “In other places I got in trouble for ‘being me’ but at U-Pres I was really allowed to be myself.”