

# *Story of Hope #3*

## *Story of Don*



While living on University Ave., Don called himself "Rain" - a name he now refers to as his "street name." His identity was so tied up with living on the streets that he had almost forgotten who he was.

Don came to Seattle from Texas in search of adventure and community. But a series of mishaps - getting laid off of work, quitting jobs he didn't like, and an inability to pay his rent - landed Don on his friends' couches. And when his friends got tired of him, he landed on the street. "I burned all my bridges," he says.

Living on the streets led to a hard-core methamphetamine addiction, which eventually led to a stint in jail. "Really, what saved me was being in jail, and having people like SYM staff who visited me while I was there," he says. "That support was awesome. I didn't expect it - I thought, 'they won't come visit me,' but you guys really did. You came to court, you went to bat for me; it blew me away."

Resources, relationships, and support from Street Youth Ministries made a life-changing difference for Don. "I would come to SYM, and there were other people there like me. And staff members would come right at me, asking how I was doing, did I need anything - they would hand me food and water, and offer me a place to do laundry. They reminded me there was another world out there, that there was life beyond the streets."

Don's favorite memory of SYM was the day a photographer came in and gave disposable cameras to every youth. "That was the start of me realizing that the street wasn't me, it didn't have to define me," he says. "I realized there were a lot of other things I had a passion for, like computers, photography, and drawing. It's when I changed my name back from 'Rain' to 'Don.' It was a growing-up moment."

He was done running, done doing drugs. He got clean and has stayed clean for 10 years. Don took his artistic and technology skills and put them to use after he moved down to Salem, OR, starting two successful small businesses. He and a friend run a computer and mobile device repair company, and they also launched a website which reviews games, movies, and much more. "I'm really proud of the website we created - it was just an idea, and we made it happen. I'm proud of that."

The most important thing Don received from SYM was confidence. "You guys kept reinforcing that we weren't bad people - we had just been dealt a bad hand," he says. "The streets were all we knew, but you kept reminding us that the world was bigger than that. You reminded us that we could get a job, get a house, do something more. And I did."