



MICHELLE WILSON

My adopted dad was in the air force so I went to school all over. I worked at a mechanic workshop for 16 years after school. After the shop I went into powder coating and welding. Every job I've had is a male's job. I'm one of these people that if you're a bloke and got a job, I can do it too.

In 2007 I tried to commit suicide after being bullied at work for many months. I ended up in hospital. They put me on medication and sent me to see a psychiatrist. The side effects of the drugs stopped me working and the psychiatrist basically told me to grow up. I ended up in hospital again but I found another counsellor. I've been seeing a counsellor ever since, will never stop.

I ended up homeless after my Auntie collected my rent and then kicked me out. I had enough money to last 2 days in a backpackers. The police gave me the homeless information phone number and they sent me to the homeless centre. The centre workers put me up in a hotel and then got me into a hostel.

I stayed there for a while but got kicked out. I had a young caseworker who wasn't competent or very nice to me. We got in regular disputes and I got kicked out when my friend Julie's 3 months there was up.

We went straight to the Queen Street Mall. The first couple days we didn't sleep. It's pretty scary on the streets. Sometimes Julie would sleep and I'd stay awake; then she'd wake up and I'd go to sleep. Then we slept near the cameras for safety as the police were keeping an eye on us.

I helped a 14 year old street kid get back home to his parents. I took him in. I said to him, 'You're too young to be on the streets, stay with me'. I used to take him to services, get him fed and showered.

Just after I got him home Micah found us in the mall. I thought they were some sort of authority. I had my back up and gave them a hard time. I didn't trust anyone.

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They said they'd find me a place but I didn't believe them and was quite rude to them. But they came back in half an hour and gave us some blankets and toiletries. The next day they checked to see if I was OK and promised again that they'd help me. That afternoon they came by and said they had a place for me to look at. I was stunned and said, 'Excuse me?!' and he said, 'Yeah, you shouldn't be on the street at your age'.

They took me to this flat. I popped my head in and said 'This is cool!' They encouraged me to have a proper look but I said 'There's a roof over my head and a front and back door, I'm happy.' They said I could move in the next day and I thought 'You liars!' But they moved me into the flat full of furniture and food the next day and my attitude completely changed. I'd never met anyone who had done something like this for me. It's always me been fighting for everything I might want, what I need and what I've got.

I slept for 3 days and when I woke up it was like I was in real life. I've been here 4 weeks and Micah keep checking I'm OK. If I need help they're there. I've got work as a security guard now. The most full on shift is the 24-hour McDonalds', especially the ones near pubs. I'm getting more shifts and I'll be off the dole soon. The day I'm off the dole I'll throw a party.

I've cleared my debts and just put a deposit on a car. Once I pay that off I want to save a deposit for my own place. I have cut my medication down so that I can drive for my job and want to get off it altogether. And the police called me the other day offering me some work as a Police Liaison Officer.

I've had Julie staying here as she is diabetic and I couldn't leave her on the streets alone. But Micah has just found Julie a place in the same block. We can still be friends but not in each other's hair. The best of both worlds.

Writer: Ben Pennings, June 2011.