

Tammy P. Voices of the Homeless

I'm 27 years old and am the daughter of Vietnam War refugees from Laos. My family immigrated to Kansas when a Christian family sponsored them in 1985.

"I graduated with an associates degree in Kansas then moved to California to attend CR and UC Santa Barbara to pursue a geology degree. I moved back to Humboldt County 2 weeks before starting again at CR for the Fall 2017 semester."

I couchsurfied with my dog and it was tough to find a place since deposits were high and I only had about \$500. My parents didn't have the means to help me since my father can't work due to PTSD from the war and my mother works in a Rubbermaid factory making only \$9 hour. I don't have a car so I started camping at the KOA in Samoa before it got too cold and rainy.

Then, I met a woman who lived between College Cove and Patrick's Point who said I could camp in her backyard and let me use the bathroom in her garage. That's where I stayed through the fall semester and winter. I had no internet or refrigerator and would do my laundry at school, but I did have a small camping stove to cook on, and mainly ate rice and eggs or dry goods from the CR food pantry.

I have class every day and my schedule revolves around the bus schedule. I would need to leave my camp near Patrick's Point by 5:30 am to get to the Trinidad bus stop by 6:45am, then arriving at CR by 830am.

In the fall semester my Tuesday/Thursday classes went to 8 p.m., and the bus doesn't go to Trinidad that late, so I would have to take the bus to the Airport then walk to my camp from there since I have a dog. I would use a headlamp and carry a maglite flashlight with me for safety, and the only time I ever got nervous was around Moonstone since that was where other homeless people were camping. The walk would take 3 ½-4 hours, and sometimes I would camp near CR when I couldn't do the trip.

On the nights that I had to camp near school, I would usually stay in the wooded area behind the dorms and then use the shower facilities in the gym in the mornings.

During this spring semester, I was connected with someone who was looking for a roommate in Trinidad. I only needed first month's rent so it worked out, and now I finally have my own room with my dog. I even have wifi!

One thing I learned from being homeless was that your circumstances do not define you and that it's never too late to start over.

Homelessness is one of the most difficult challenges to overcome in life but we grow the most when we are faced with difficulty. In the beginning, you will shed many tears each time you have to tell or even think about your story. You will fall and you will fall hard. But you must learn to never panic and to keep your head high as best you can and keep moving forward.

When I look back to see what I had to endure while I was homeless and how I was able to overcome those tough times, they are reminders of how I became a stronger person, and they taught me more than a book or mentor could ever teach me.