

## Carolyn Blanchey's Story

*(From her speech given on 9/25/10 at Solid Ground's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Building Community Luncheon)*

Hi! My name is Carolyn, and I want to tell you something about my life.

We were what you call a solid middle class family. I worked, my husband worked, we went on vacations, all that kind of stuff.

So it's hard even for me to believe how quickly it all came apart.

The day my daughter Tiaonna had her first birthday, I found out I had a brain tumor.

I had surgery that left me with a huge memory loss. And though I'd been working at Pacific Medical Center for 18 years, when I had this tumor my memory went to a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level.

When I came back from my medical leave, my memory loss made it impossible to hold my job.

With my job loss we could not afford our apartment and so we ended up getting evicted, and our van was repossessed.

I was like, "Oh my God, what is next?" Then my husband's company went completely out of business and he lost his job.

And that is how, over the course of several months, we became homeless.

First, we turned to a shelter in the Central District. Now, what a lot of people don't know is that you can only stay in a shelter for a few weeks. On our very last day at that shelter, we got a call from Anna Strahan in Solid Ground's Family Shelter program. She got my family into one of the apartments in Crown Hill that Solid Ground leases for homeless families like ours.

Anna helped us in so many ways, with simple stuff like money for laundry and Christmas presents for the kids. She also stood up with us in dealing with landlords, especially when we were being discriminated against. Most importantly, she always, always helped us keep focused on getting stable and working toward our better future.

Another thing that most people don't know about being homeless is that once you are homeless, it's so hard to find housing. That's because you have to pay first and last month's rent and security deposit to move in to permanent housing, and we did not have that amount of money.

But Anna found us the money we needed, and helped us move in, and got us furniture and other resources. And Carla, from Solid Ground's JourneyHome program, checked in regularly to make sure we were doing OK.



Carolyn Blanchey, 9/25/09 *(photo by JB Productions)*

What meant the most to me is that when I first met Anna, and every time she talked to me, she was not judgmental about our situation.

There is still a lot that we are going through, but I figure that with everything we've had to go through, I can turn around and help someone else who is as lost as we were. That is the way I take it. If I am going through this, God trusted me with this storm. I was homeless, my car was repossessed, I had a tumor, and my daughter was one year old. If He didn't think I could handle the storm, He wouldn't make me go through it.

And guess what... I'm here today to tell you that we went through this storm and we survived it.

It's been hard on my kids and husband. We've been married 21 years and dated 10 before that. And through everything I've been through, through every up and down, my husband has been there for me, right by my side. We have had a really, really hard time, but he has been with me all the way.

Prayer and faith and God have gotten me through.

My husband and kids have gotten me through.

And helping others has gotten my through.

I found out there were other folks at our church who were homeless. And I was able to help them. Even though we had so little, I was able to share what I had.

Sometimes all I could share was my hugs and my experience. But if I know somebody needs something, I do what I can.

Over a year ago I joined the Solid Ground Advisory Council. We meet once a month, folks who have turned to Solid Ground for help, and we give our perspective on the agency and its programs. When I was asked to go on it, I thought: I don't have a college degree, I don't have this... what can I bring to the group?

And Anna said, "Carolyn, just your story is enough to help somebody else." And ever since I've been on the Advisory Council, I've really enjoyed it and I've really made a difference.

Earlier this year we marched in Olympia, my daughter Tionna and I. She went on the march and talked to senators and representatives. I was a spokesperson for our district. But the first person they asked a question to was my daughter Tiaonna.

And my daughter Tionna, who was homeless even before she was two, she told them this: "I don't think any family should ever have to be homeless; I think every family should have a home."

And that's what I want to leave you with today: Every family should have a home. And every one of us can help make that happen.

Thanks for being here and thanks for helping Solid Ground get families like mine into homes.