

Homelessness to hope: how one man's life changed

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(Photo: Mickey Welsh / Montgomery Advertiser)

Editor's Note: In mid-July, Montgomery Advertiser reporter Kym Klass and photographer Mickey Welsh met Edward Moye, a homeless man who lived under a tree just off Ann Street by Interstate 85. Moye was interviewed and photographed for an article previewing the Mid-Alabama Coalition for the Homeless Resource Fair. Three months later, Moye visited the Advertiser to tell a new story.

Edward Moye takes a deep, sharp breath before starting to talk.

He holds his hands over his face and slowly starts telling a story about recovery, second chances, liquor, addiction, drugs, time spent in prison, beer. And about three months in which he has changed his life; three months of being sober.

He talks about the month of July, when he saw his photo in the local newspaper, and how he thought, "*Is this me?*"

That picture, I'll be lying in bed, sleeping, when I see that picture in my dream, I wake up. I sweat. I could see you standing there beside me. And I wake up in a sweat. I can see the guy taking my picture, and when he snapped the picture — click! — and the sound wakes me up.

Moye is 57 years old. Before coming to Montgomery, and before finding his spot under a tree off Ann Street — where he lived, ate and waited for cars to pass by so that he could offer to wash them — he said he was in and out of prison in Michigan for 15 years.

He broke into a pawn shop after he says a store employee short-changed him. He was drunk, and was caught. But says even in prison, he had ways to stay high. There were pain pills, dope.

Moye covers his face with his hands again, remembering the life. The choices he made. The transition home he said he was forced to live in after he left prison for the last time, and from where he would slip out every chance he got to drink a beer or two.

He becomes emotional because he said he knows he can be better than he was — despite knowing he is in a better place today than he was just three months ago. Still, there is something nagging at him from the inside: the knowledge of understanding that life can be so much better.

It's there. And when I see somebody else out there, I tell them. He pauses, breathes deeply, sharply. I tell them and they don't want to listen ... that there are people out there and they want to help you. They know you are sick, and that this is a disease.

When you were on the streets, did you have people telling you the same thing?

That's what hurts so bad. God sends somebody to you, and you just turn them away. It's like turning God down.

Shortly after Moye's story was published in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, he said he was approached by someone who identified himself as being from the governor's mansion. A white man, khaki pants, white shirt, clean cut. He wouldn't give his name, but showed him the newspaper and asked, "Do you want some help, or do you want to go to jail?"

Moye asked for "help" in the form of a pint of liquor. Instead, he accepted help by way of detox at a local hospital. The man from the governor's mansion, he said, took him there.

I was high, but instantly took notice of the picture. I looked at it, and ... I kept trying to figure out, 'Is this me?' I never looked at the mirror. I was stuck on that picture.

He went through three days of detox, left voluntarily, and walked into a homeless shelter, and again, looked in the mirror. He didn't like what he saw.

Receiving help

Moye has a team working for him at Reality and Truth Ministries. They take him to AA meetings, to his residence on Clayton Street, and helps him manage finances.

"He is definitely looking great," said LaDonna Brindle, executive director of the day ministry for the homeless on South Court Street. "And we do assist him. Multiple people have taken part in his recovery."

Before helping any homeless, the first thing they must have is the desire to change and live a different life. When they do, the ministry invests more in them. When Moye walked through the doors, one of the first things Brindle noticed was his transparency about his life and his acknowledgment of his struggles.

"He finally gets the whole thing of what we do," she said. "We know there is hope for tomorrow. Our job is to help them see that. You have to see a different person. He realizes he has to go day by day. And I'm excited. So many people think there is no hope for homeless people."

A new day, a new man

Compared to three months ago, Moye's face looks younger. The black and gray stubble on his face is shaved, and his skin, smooth. His eyes have changed from being glossed over to clear. The only recognizable feature on his face are the freckles that sit on his cheekbones. He is sober, can taste food again and has a desire to live. He says he feels *better, good, I laugh for real, and I don't want to live that life any more.*

But he also knows every day is new. That today doesn't promise tomorrow. That choices have to be made daily.

Being an alcoholic broke him down to less than a man, and he credits God for the change, and also the network of people around him that keep him in prayer.

My problem was, in my mind, was that people were always against me because I was a criminal and they didn't want to be around me. I got into the state of mind that I could drink, cover up. And think, 'I don't need you,' I can drink me a cold beer and feel good, but all the time, the pain inside of me was there.

He now encourages others to enter detox, to have support from family and the community, to stay away from their past on the streets. He advises people not to go through the transformation alone because it could be damaging. Moye didn't know anyone when he went through detox. He doesn't mention the hospital, only that when he got to the program, he saw a lot of broken families. So they became a family to each other. And they showed each other love.

To make it through the days, Moye has had to start adjusting to acceptance of his new life. He has learned how to listen to people. When he was drunk, he heard you, but never

listened. He understands he has to earn trust from others, and has been told it can take two to three years for it to happen.

AA meetings are helping with that. Moyer said he attends them near Eastdale Mall, at a Baptist church, at a building on Court Street, another on the west side of town. He tries to attend meetings daily — sometimes twice a day if possible.

Life is better. Moyer has bread, bologna and water. He owns one pair of jeans, a white T-shirt and a fleece jacket. One pair of shoes. He really wants some curtains for the windows where he lives. And a refrigerator. And, he said, a makeover. *I don't want to go to meetings looking like a bum.*

He is interested in looking for janitorial work. Said anything more manual would hurt the arthritis in his already-knotted fingers. He won't take anything for it, though. Tried Advil once, but if he takes anything that makes him feel groggy, he won't take it again because he knows what it would lead to. Liquor already took enough from him, and he is not going back.

Today, he said, he is doing OK.

If you let go of that pain and all that abuse you went through as a child ... if you let it go, and try to put God or something else better in that place, you would be a whole lot better. I had to replace my past, and put other stuff in the crevices.

The journey is just beginning.