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## Streets Are for Nobody: Mary

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## Streets Are for Nobody: Mary

*Early fifties; married, with one child. Employed when homeless 1970–1972. Works in a shelter.*

I had left home because of an argument. And I couldn't afford an apartment, so, um, I had got a room up on Temple Street in backa the State House. And, ah, the landlady there had a little bit of a problem — she used to think that the men that lived in the house were trying to get into bed with her every night, so she'd be knockin' on my door, "Help me! Help me!" So I just couldn't take her anymore, so I just left and, ah, stayed on the street, you know, knew everybody — we all stayed up on the hill. I'm the only one that had a job, so I used to feed everybody. Payday would come and I would go shopping. We'd have picnics up on the hill — up on the Boston Common. On weekends in the summertime, we'd all come down here fishin' and barbecue down here and spend the whole weekend. And then I'd leave about midnight, time to go somewhere and get some rest to get up the next day and go to work. I worked in a printing company.

We knew a lotta people that had rooms and stuff, so we'd just go there, take a shower and clean up. And every week I'd do my laundry for the week and I'd put it like in a little bag, and then I would go to the Jordan Marsh ladies' room and change, you know, and do my things in the sink in the morning — wash up and comb my hair and everything, put on my makeup for the day, and go out.

I was totally happy. Well, I thought I was happy because I was going out with somebody at the time and I thought we were gonna get married. I didn't know that he was not a very nice-type person. I saw him about two weeks ago — filthy, dirty, in the gutter, you know. I just practically stepped over him. But anyway, it was — it was a good experience. That's why I know a lotta these people that come in, not the younger ones, but the older ones — we used to all sleep together on one blanket. From seventy to seventy-two.

And I used to work [nine to five]. At night when I got outa my job, around nine o'clock at night, I used to go help out in a, um, a restaurant on Charles Street.

I probably . . . probably wouldn't do it again. Even if I was the same age, I don't think I . . . I'd do it again. First of all, the summer it was nice because we'd be, you know, out at the beach all the time. But in the winter, I just can't hack it, and how much can you stand on a grate to keep warm, you know? It's dangerous, for one thing, you know, and then you have to watch out at night when you sleep for the rats

*Interviewed by Melissa Shook, June 24, 1990, Castle Island, South Boston. Reprinted, with permission, from "Streets Are for Nobody: Homeless Women Speak," Boston Center for the Arts, 1991.*

and whatever else. So, mosta the time, we just stood up all night. I used to be at work in the ladies' room a lot, catchin' forty winks [laugh].

Well, when I was homeless, most of the people that were homeless were either alcoholics or just young runaways. There weren't that many people that had, you know, come outa mental institutions and stuff.

There was a woman named Helen that lived in, um, the Park Street subway station. She had a locker and she'd keep all her clothes and her cat in there. She used to carry her cat around in a bag, shoppin' bag — and then put it in there at night. She had a beautiful singin' voice, she could sing. And I heard she passed away, um, couple a years ago. And she used to dress fit to kill. She was always a . . . fashion plate, you know, with the makeup and everything.

[A better social net would be:]

A shelter with ss . . . s . . . some limits, some goals for the women, not to open up more shelters — that's not the answer. The answer is affordable housing for people. Granted a lot of these people have mental problems, *but*, open up supervised housing. Some of these people could function very well.

I own my own home, okay, and I have tenants. I cannot go up on their rent because I feel sorry for people. Meanwhile, that means I have to put out of my pocket "x" amounta dollars so that I can cover my mortgage every month, because people have to live somewhere. And when I had apartments for rent, I told the real estate agent, do not send me anybody unless they have children — nobody wants to rent to people with children. So I shoulda went up on my tenants' rent three years ago. I can't do it. They can't afford it, so what am I gonna do? Throw them out on the street? 🙄