

Stories: This is Hunger

Mollie

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I used to have big money, the good income. I'd take friends out to dinner and travel – to London and Scotland. If I saw a collectible online I wanted, I'd buy it.

I could not have perceived in a million years that I would ever be unemployed and kicked out of my apartment. Then, the recession hit and by 2012, my successful New England tour company was making one-fifth the income it did the year before. I'm a single woman so I decided to cut my losses, sell the business, and move back to New Orleans. That's the place that feels like home to me.

I did everything to find work and applied for countless jobs. But as a 59-year-old former journalist and business owner, I was either over-qualified or rejected because of my age. Employers just don't want us – people over 50. After nine months, my savings ran out. I became late in my rent and couldn't pay my utilities. I had to sell everything I owned – my car, art, CDs, antiques – to have cash to live on. I was evicted from my apartment with nowhere to go. I figured I could live on the streets, but not my dog. I gave him to an Akita rescue organization, but that broke my heart since he was the only thing left from my past. Four days later I followed him to Thibidoux, Louisiana – a place I'd never heard of before.

Not long after I got here, I saw a long line of people in front of a building. I was curious what they were doing, what was in the boxes they were getting. That's how I found out about the food pantry. Before that, I had never heard of food pantries. Since then, I've been going to Good Samaritan Food Bank whenever I can. Although you don't get to pick and choose what you want, it's good because they include things you can't buy with food stamps – like toiletries and paper products.

These days, I'm eating pretty low level, just canned goods like Vienna sausage, spinach, peaches, because \$200 in food stamps is just not enough for one adult. I drink a lot of water to help prevent hunger. I can't afford fresh food. I only eat lunch and dinner and have only coffee for breakfast. When my food stamps run out, it's kinda scary not knowing if I'm gonna have any money to eat tomorrow. Every time I go to the grocery store I look my receipt and say, "O.K., how much do I have until the sixth of next month when I get my food stamps again?" I'm worrying all the time, trying to save myself here. I'm thinking: I've got so much to give, a lot of experience. I ask myself, "What can I do next? What haven't I tried?" So, I pray, take a nap, re-strategize, and pick myself up.

I've had moments of being embarrassed and on the verge of tears because I don't understand why I can't control any of this. But when I eat, I feel refreshed, and that maybe things will get better. They have a bit. I'm working part time at a retail big box store. I make \$8, which comes to \$800 a month. I'm living in a run-down trailer, but at least it's with my dog. I'm hoping to get full time work, so I can afford to move us to a better place. I don't know if I'll ever make the money that I did up north, but I hope I can move back to New Orleans someday. New Orleans has always been a happy place to me.

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