



**THE HARBOR**

## Charlene: Getting By One Day At A Time

Charlene and her mother became homeless a few years ago after her grandmother died and they lost their house.

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Charlene Labuquen isn't one for grandiose dreams or big ambitions.

The last few years have been hard for the heavyset 33-year-old, who has a slow shuffle of a walk but a quick and easy smile.

Charlene and her mother lost their home a few years ago, after her grandmother died and Charlene's hours were cut back at work.

Charlene's mother doesn't work. She's schizophrenic, Charlene says, but has never wanted to take medication for the illness. The family had barely been keeping the bills paid with her grandmother's income and the pay from Charlene's two minimum-wage jobs.

When her grandmother died, everything just fell apart. So did Charlene.



Charlene lives in a tent next to her mother in The Harbor. Despite the difficulties she faces, the 33-year-old is one of the friendliest residents of The Harbor.

Charlene and her mother live in a cluster of tents near the water. Mounds of trash surround the area, and flies hover over shopping carts full of empty plastic bottles. Monday is one of the only days she has to buy her own food, she says. The rest of the week there's usually a food bank or someone who comes by and dishes up at least one meal in the park.

The first time she came to The Harbor she was scared, and appalled by all the trash in the area.

"I was like oh my goodness, this is where I have to live," Charlene says. "But then after that I got used to it."

In August, Charlene's walk was slowed down by open sores the size of quarters on her ankles that dripped clear pus all over her feet. She says a doctor told her she had a staph infection, but the antibiotics she was given her didn't work. The dirt in the camp is filled with bacteria that keep the wounds from healing.

Neighbors say maybe the mother and daughter would be better off in a group home. Charlene says they're doing OK where they are.

Charlene says she's working with a case manager to try to get her life back together. She dreams of having an apartment again and a job, though she also admits that she's blown off at least one interview that the social worker set up for her. Her motivation levels seem to only go so far.

For now, her most immediate hope is finding an organization that can give her a bed. She sleeps without any real padding beneath her, and her body aches when she gets up in the morning.

Charlene says she's not depressed though. She was after her grandmother died, she says. Now she takes antidepressants. They help a lot, she says.

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