



## Homeless Stories: Then and Now

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It's not that they made it out alive. It's that they have tangible evidence of the misconceptions plaguing the homeless community each and every day. The "they" in this reference are homeless people - well, that is, homeless people who have overcome their situation and are not homeless anymore. Some of these people go on to lead extraordinary lives as advocates for the less fortunate, and others just smile at the fact that they are able to tell their stories. These people that have the rare experience of seeing life at both spectrums, these are the people that can equate their experience and truly value what they have. This is not to say other traumas "disqualify" people from this double experience, because that is extremely incorrect. However, those who were previously homeless can speak to a certain misconception that many of us only see or read about. The stories these previously homeless people have to offer put not only the rest of the population in perspective, but it gives them a change to be an omniscient narrator in their own lives.

Sometimes, those who experience homelessness come out stronger than ever. For example, take Meg Shimatsu, a woman who went through medical troubles and needed money for procedures. *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Steve Lopez, explains how, "Shimatsu has spent years on a waiting list for a kidney transplant, and for more than a year, she parked the Toyota in the lot of the Glendale hospital where she gets dialysis treatment. At night, unable to afford a home on her disability check, she curled up in the back seat of the Corolla, closed her eyes and went to sleep." Meg Shimatsu's experience speaks not only to her ability to overcome harsh conditions and medical necessities, but also her admirable, persistent character in the face of adversity. She also shatters a common misconception about the homeless population. Needing money for treatment is why she became homeless; something many Americans understand and probably resonate with on a personal level.

In addition to the courageous story of Meg Shimatsu, other previously-homeless individuals understand the transition from no home to a home and the monumental implications such transitions hold. For instance, Theresa May, contributor to *Diss*, explains how she even indulged in some of the common homeless misconceptions. However, she wanted to change this perception because she knew there was more to the story. She elaborated on how, "...having lied to homeless people too many times about my pocket finances, [she] was prompted to explore the world which seems so far away from our own. [She] spoke to campaigner Hugo Sugg, who used to be homeless himself, to gain an insight into what it is like to be on the other side; to be ignored by people enjoying their lives. It turns out that this terrifying world is not too far away from any of us." Hugo Sugg, the man interviewed by May, elaborated on his homelessness by saying how, "Determination to get a house again and not cave in to pressure to go back home. [He] didn't want to go back 'home' to [his] parents, even though they offered

[him] somewhere to stay. This was mostly down to [his] own stubbornness.” Sugg’s interview shattered an innumerable number of misconceptions about homeless people. Not only was he homeless by choice, but he refused to give in - he had pride in himself and knew he would find a way out by himself. This is important to understand because he chose not to define himself by the stigma usually associated with homelessness, he formed his own path.

Therefore, it is important to listen to the stories of those who used to be homeless because they understand both perspectives of living. They understand the odorous stench associated with being homeless, but they know there are deeper reasons for why people do not have homes. These open-minded experiences serve to better the population as a whole and shatter misconceptions about what being homeless really is.

## Resources

<http://diss.ltd/story-interview-ex-homeless-man-will-now-sharing-views-theresa-may>

<https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-lopez-shimatsu-home-20180919-story.html>