



▲ (L-R) BIANCA AND SUE

Embraced by Love

Bianca remembers exactly where she was the first time Sue from The Salvation Army's transitional housing programme called.

'I was driving. I pulled over and as she talked it felt like Sue had just reached through the phone and wrapped her arms around me,' recalls Bianca.

Raised by parents living with active addiction, Bianca thought that when her violent father left everything would improve. But she soon became a victim of childhood sexual abuse at the hands of a family friend.

At the age of 10 Bianca tried alcohol for the first time. By the time she was 13 Bianca had been introduced to methamphetamine. She left school and at just 15 was working as a prostitute to support her habit. In and out of dysfunctional and abusive relationships, Bianca moved onto needles. Now also involved in crime, she narrowly escaped a prison sentence because of her young age. But it was a near fatal overdose that caused Bianca to reach out for help. She was just 19 years old when she entered rehab for the first time.

'Rehab completely ruined my using because after that I had a conscience for the first time,' laughs Bianca. 'But still I was on and off drugs for years.' When Bianca met Les, her husband of 16 years, she spiralled into post-partum depression following the birth of their first child. Vodka and party pills helped her get through, but with the arrival of three more children over the ensuing years, the pull to use was strong, and long-term sobriety remained elusive.

When New Zealand's Covid-19 national lockdown hit, Bianca and the family had just moved to Papakura. 'I was pretty deep in my using during that lockdown period. I was a mess and our relationship was a mess,' she recalls. By the time level 4 was lifted, the landlord had unexpectedly sold the property.

'I was so shocked. I applied for lots of houses, but when you're using you can't follow through on the viewings because you keep putting it off until tomorrow—that's what addicts do. I was stunned when I realised I only had one week left to find somewhere. Me and the children ended up at the Quest Hotel.'

Bianca reached out to her AA sponsor, realising she just had to get clean—after all, she had to drive her children to school in Papakura from Auckland City everyday. ‘So I just pulled away from everyone—no one could get to me in the hotel. I was so far away and 9 floors up. All I did was eat, sleep and pick up the children from school. I detoxed myself.’

After four months in the hotel, Bianca was offered transitional housing which she says changed the whole trajectory of her life and recovery journey.

‘When I first came to the Sallies, and Sue was visiting me, I was lost and broken. I was clean but still an addict inside and I didn’t know how to fix myself. But now I feel so proud of myself—especially of the mother

‘I fell in love with the Sallies. Anyone giving to them should have no doubt that their money goes exactly where it’s needed—to helping people and re-homing addicts like me and giving us a chance to start over—it’s beautiful and I’m just so grateful.’

I’ve become. I was lost and broken, but now I’m strong and proud.’

Sue’s visits and practical support helped Bianca chip away at her goals.

‘Sue’s more than just a social worker. She’s like my counsellor

and Mum rolled into one. She challenges me to keep learning and growing.’ Bianca reports.

Bianca made new friends and gained self awareness through attending The Salvation Army’s ‘PLP’ (positive lifestyle programme) course. ‘I had a lot to learn about love. It’s hard when you’ve been so broken. You have to come back to those core beliefs and challenge the stinking thinking and rebuild everything. It takes a lot of courage to do it. But the Sallies embraced me and loved me—they’re my family now. They’ll walk beside you and take you where you need to go. They’ve got me here and my gratitude is shown every day when I get up and be thankful and choose not to use,’ says a confident, hope-filled Bianca.

