

VICTORY

Around the country, people are finding help and hope overcoming homelessness

BY SHIRLEY HENDERSON & KEVIN CHAPPELL PHOTOGRAPHY BY VALERIE GOODLOE

The economic downturn has taken many prisoners. It has been almost two years since the recession began in December 2007, and many people have become locked in a cycle of financial hardship due to job loss, foreclosure or eviction.

It seems that no city has escaped the economy's reach unscathed. News stories carry images of tent cities that have sprung up around Los Angeles, Miami and Washington, D.C., and are allegedly filled with the newly homeless. Many people go to family and friends for help or seek refuge in shelters, churches or in some desperate cases, their cars.

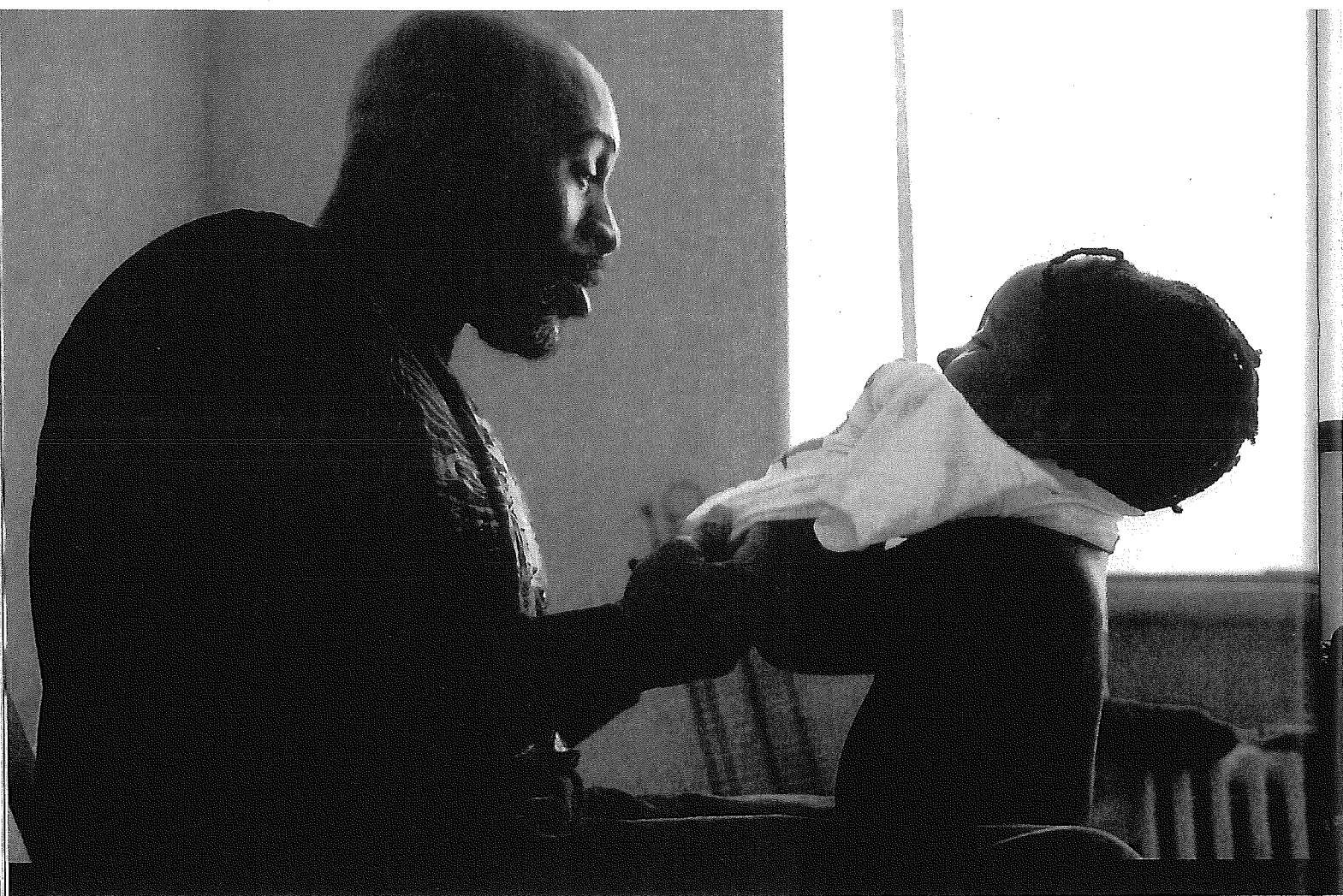
The saying goes that when America gets a cold, Black America gets pneumonia. So how are African-Americans faring in the face of these circumstances? Black neighborhoods are continuing to face high foreclosure rates in cities such as Chicago, Detroit and Las Vegas. Of the 14.7 million Americans without jobs, the unemployment rate for Blacks was 14.7 percent as of June 2009, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Still, there is hope. At the beginning of the year, Congress passed an almost-\$800 billion economic recovery package that includes \$1.5 billion for the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). Columbus, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., are implementing models to curtail the problem of homelessness and paving the way for other cities to follow.

The six individuals who we have profiled in this story all have had a brush with homelessness. Most of them were gainfully employed at some time. All have children or families. In some cases, the new face of the homeless may look familiar.



Joseph Harris and his son Joseph III, who is called by his middle name, Pierre, leave the child care center to catch a bus as they go about their daily routine in Washington, D.C.



Joseph Harris prepares his son, Pierre, inside an apartment loaned to him by a friend. Later (clockwise), the two engage in a spirited game of catch in their living room. Joseph enrolls his son in day care at Perry School in Washington, D.C. Father and son bond and Pierre enjoys a bus ride with dad on their way to court.

the single FATHER

NAME: Joseph Harris, 46
LOCATION: Washington, D.C.

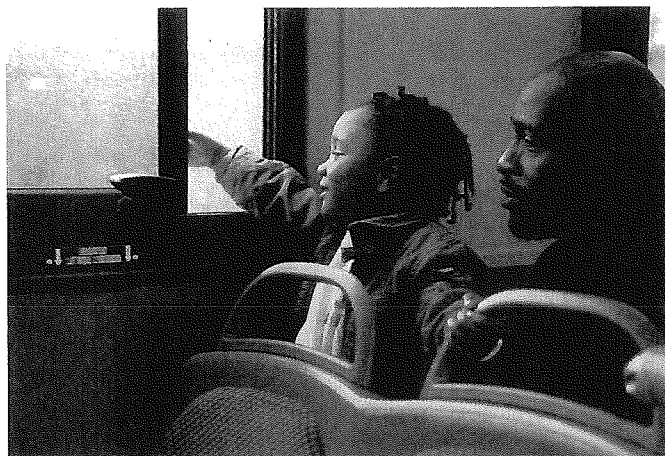
'I'm not a person who goes to church. I do know that throughout my struggles, as long as I stayed positive, God has been with me.'

I used to pour concrete by trade, but I was in a car accident and couldn't work for a while.

I was evicted from my apartment last fall. I stayed with friends and at motels. Slept in my car for a while. I tapped into some social programs, but there are so many people in need that I kept getting doors closed.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

My main thing is that I don't want brownie points. If you have a child, you're supposed to take care of your child. This is what I'm supposed to do. I haven't cured AIDS. I don't have a cure for cancer. Somebody might say, "Oh, wow! Look at him." I don't want to come across like that at all. This is my responsibility. No matter how rough it gets, I have to stick with it [and] try to make the best



decisions for my son (4-year-old Joseph III) and me.

The hardest part is when he can't run around in his own place, and now he has to go with other people who are telling him, "Don't do this. Don't touch that." We used to have our own place. He had his own toys. He could do what he wanted to do.

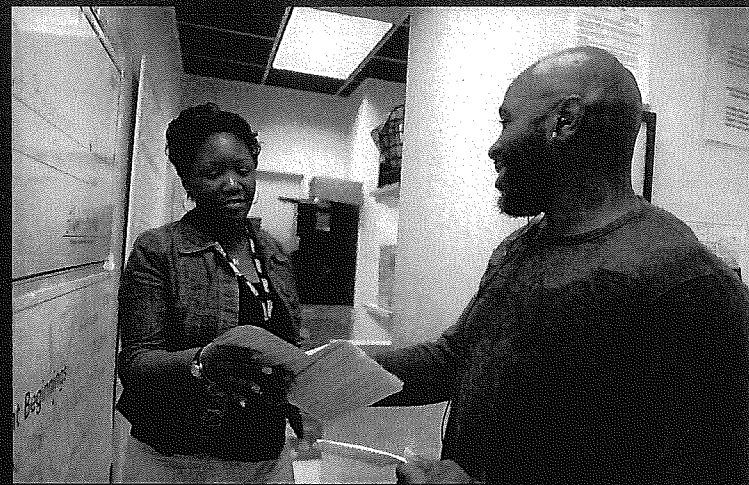
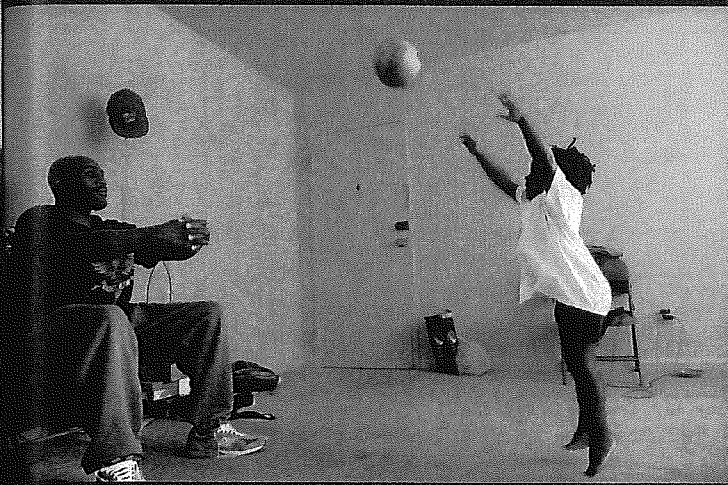
Taking care of my son is a lot easier now. When he was small, I had the little harness. But now he can walk. I still end up putting him on my shoulders anyway.

I want to set a foundation for us. We need stability. We can do a lot of things that normal families do. Once I obtain that, the sky

I believe God put me in this situation. God works in mysterious ways to those who don't know him. But there ain't nothing mysterious about God. You have to be patient and quiet to hear what he's saying. Being raised as a Christian when I was a little boy, I read the entire Bible.

One thing I do know is that you need two parents to raise a child, to get that balance. I have all of the testosterone for my son, but he needs that nurturing spirit, too. Hopefully, one day, I will be blessed with a beautiful young lady who will understand. A man needs a woman. A woman completes a man. A woman gives a man strong advice.

My son wants to be president when he grows up. But I just



is the limit. I don't want to work all my life. So I have to think of other avenues. My main objective is to be the first generation to leave something for my son. Then he may have something to give to his son and it won't be so hard [for him].

I visualize me having all of those things. One thing that I do know—and I'm not a person who goes to church—I do know that throughout my struggles, as long as I stayed positive, God has been with me. I pray.

At one time, I let my circumstances allow me to be around people who were shady [and] were involved in trying to get a quick buck. But God spoke directly to me and told me that my son needed me. I figured out that there was another way.

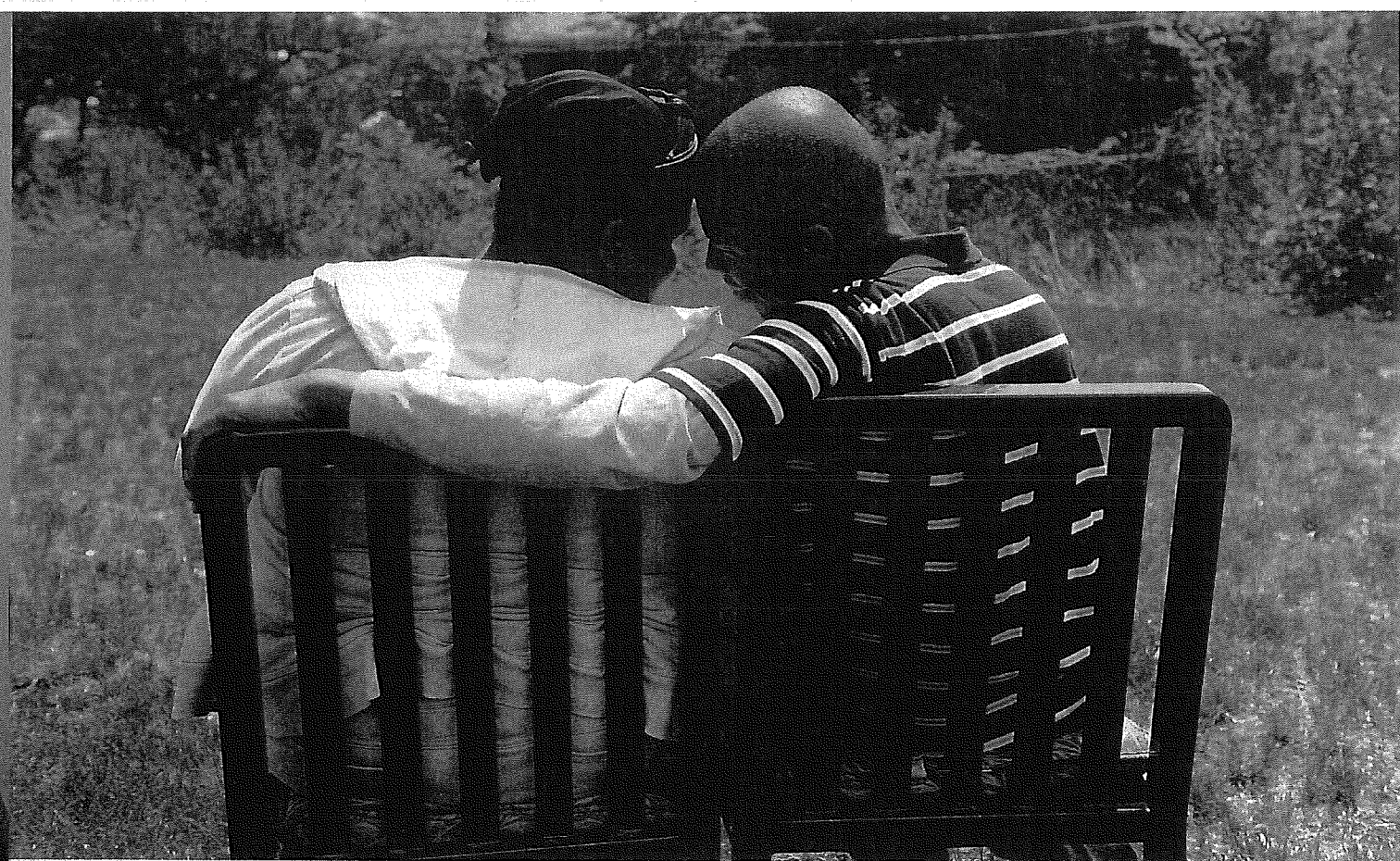
If I need some money, let me go cut some grass. Let me go to somebody's house to see if they need their windows washed. I know that sounds crazy in today's time, but I think God is all that. So I may go to a person, and they [might] need nothing done, but by me coming at them in [a certain] manner, they may just say, "You know anything about drywall? I got something that needs to be done in my garage."

And that's how God blesses us. I was blocking my blessing by jumping out there and trying to get my own, and ended up coming close to being incarcerated. If I love my son the way I say that I do, why would I put myself in a position where I can't be around my son? God got me through that, and I made a promise to myself that I would never, ever do anything illegal.

want him to reach his full potential in whatever he chooses to do. I just hope that God allows me be on this earth to help him work toward that.

When my son grows up, I hope he will look at me and say, "Even through all of the struggle, all of the frustration, all of the things that people said to you that you wouldn't have taken but you took for me, I love you."





While the kids attend school, Richard and Waurkeeta Bost take a moment to discuss their plans for the day. (Below) Back at the shelter, Richard ends the day by helping sons Jayden and Jaijuan with a bath.

the married COUPLE

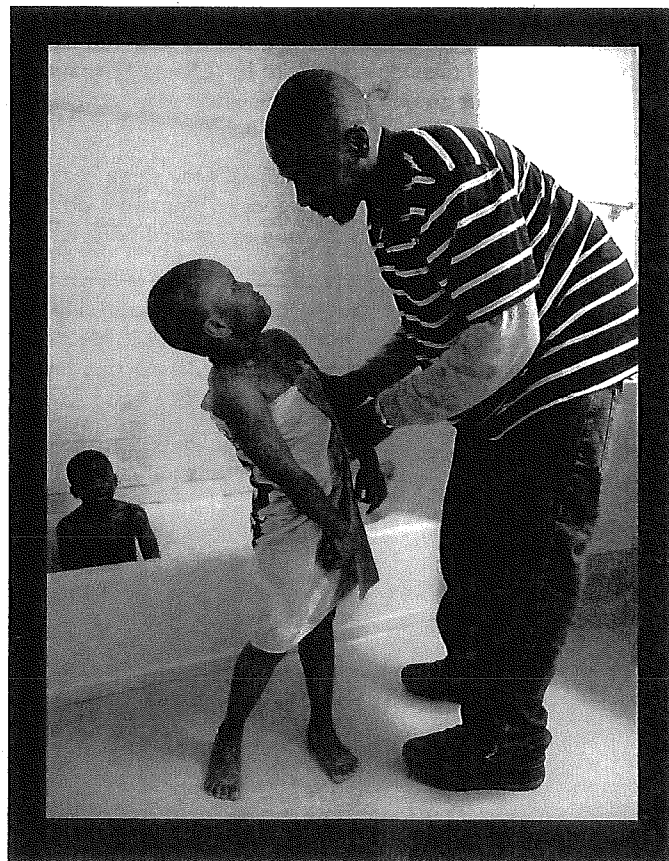
NAMES: Waurkeeta Bost, 30; Richard Bost, 35
LOCATION: Columbus, Ohio

'Our goals are to find a safe place to live, get employed, raise our children and be productive.'

Waurkeeta: I was born and raised in Columbus. My husband is from Chicago. Richard and I kind of found each other here, fell in love and got married. We have three kids, Jayden, 5; Jaijuan, 6; and Sandra, 13.

I worked for a company called Excel, which works with Toys "R" Us and Babies "R" Us. They do online merchandising. I was a receiver. It was a seasonal position from September until December 2008. It was my second year working for them. They let me go the day before Christmas.

Richard: I used to work on the production line of Magnetic Springs, a water bottling company. I was there a little over three





The Bost family (above) enjoys breakfast inside the YWCA shelter in Columbus, Ohio. Later (below), Jayden returns home from day care and is greeted by his mother, sister, Sandra; and brother, Jaijuan.

years working as a water bottler until the layoff in October 2008.

I've worked a few temp jobs since the layoff. None of them really took. I also do a lot of other things. If I had my choice, I'd be a cook. I got my experience as a cook in the military. At the time that I was working, we were renting a house with three bedrooms.

Waurkeeta: We couldn't afford to live in the house anymore and they were trying to evict us. So to not have anything [bad] on our credit report, we left. My older sister let us come and live with her from October 2008 to April of this year.

There were some issues at her house. We made the decision to come here to get the help that we needed. The shelter (YWCA Columbus) is divided into different "neighborhoods." We have our own room with bunk beds. We have a shower in the bathroom and they have a shared family bathroom to bathe the kids in.

The first night in the shelter, Jaijuan cried. I was a little leery of coming to a shelter. I've never been in a shelter and I didn't know what to expect. But when I got here, everyone made me feel basically like I was home. The staff was nice.

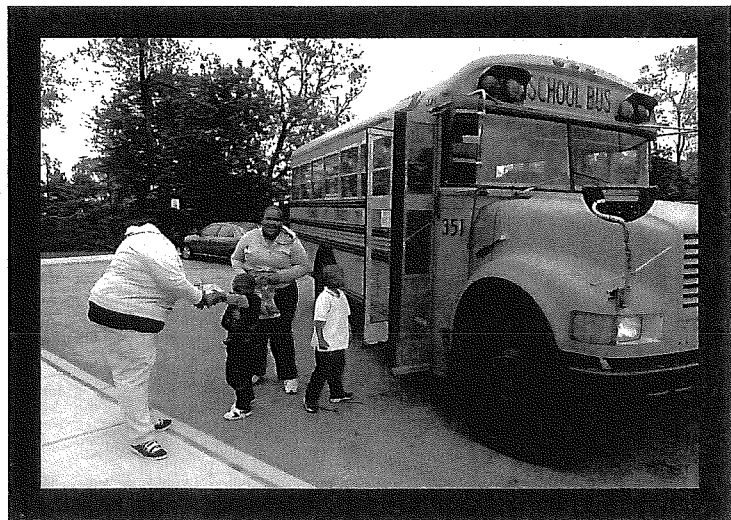
I don't blame anybody else or blame myself for our situation. I felt like, if I had known [what could happen], I would have done this differently and that differently. But when they give you a pink slip to let you know that your job is ending ... I was like, "They could have let me go that [previous] Monday, instead of waiting." I was hurt more because I had small kids and I have a child who is autistic. That was another big thing. It was like, "Oh, how are we going to do this?"

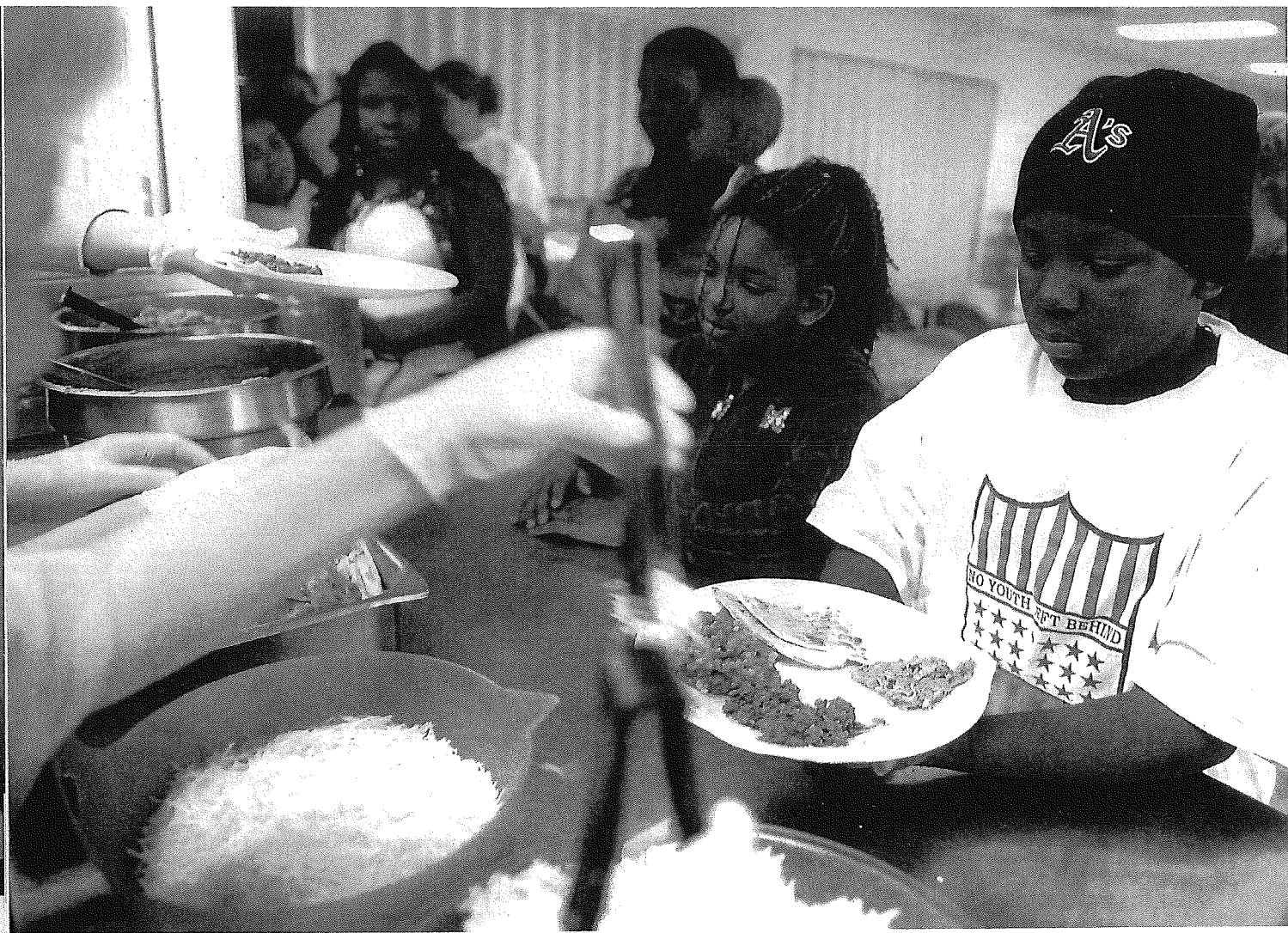
Jayden was diagnosed when he was three years old. He has his moments. He mostly has a speech delay, but we were still able to potty train him. He goes to a special-needs preschool.

[The kids] are coping better with living here. My daughter wasn't feeling it at first and my sister let her stay with her until we could get her bused to her school. We took our son back and forth to school. My daughter is living with us again. She's OK with it now.

Richard: The job market is kind of dry in Columbus. We went to a job fair yesterday. All of the jobs require that you apply for them on the Internet. Here, they let you use the computers to apply for jobs.

I mean, looking back, there were things that I should have done differently or better. It's too late to dwell on those things. All I can do is what I can do for now. I don't have the luxury or time to sit back and wonder about what I could have done or should have done. My kids, my wife, they depend on me so, I can't fail them.





Inside the St. John's Shelter Program for Women & Children in Sacramento, La Selle Manning and her children receive dinner from volunteers. (Below) La Selle, who recently moved into an apartment, transfers her possessions into a storage facility with help from her children's father.

the Single MOTHER

NAME: La Selle Manning, 30
LOCATION: Sacramento, Calif.

'I kept the faith.'

I was working part-time last year with an in-home support service and helping elderly people inside their homes. I liked working with older people. At the time, I was renting a four-bedroom house and living with my four kids, Desirae, 14;

Elijah, 11; Shadijah, 8; and Naesean, 1. I was also getting financial assistance for two of my kids.

My landlord told us that the house we were renting was going through foreclosure. I was pretty upset because we had been staying there for four years and it was home to us. I told my kids



La Selle (top, right) and her children settle into their room inside the shelter. Elijah, 11, claims a spot on the top bunk bed. Shadijah, 8, shows her mother some affection. (Bottom, right) The family settles into their new apartment right outside of Sacramento.

that the landlord couldn't afford to keep the house anymore. Following that, I lost my job. So we moved into St. John's (Shelter Program for Women & Children).

The kids didn't like it. They cried a lot. I prayed a lot. I said to God, "Let me follow your will for my life." I didn't let a lot of people know we were staying at a shelter. I was not trying to share that information with a lot of people. A couple of people knew: My family knew. My mom offered to have us come and stay with her in Oakland (Calif.): There was one time when I was discouraged and I wanted to call her up and say, "Mom, we're coming to stay with you."

I did talk with her, but we stayed in the shelter. I kept the faith. I continued to believe that one day the call would come that would say, "Your place is ready."

When I look back, I realize that I was angry at myself. I felt that if I had been better prepared, it wouldn't have happened. The whole experience actually made me stronger. I felt that my faith would get me through. So I had to adjust my life to living at a shelter and following their rules. We had chores at the shelter that included washing dishes and cleaning the bathroom. Sometimes I would help cook the meals. We had to be in the shelter each day by 5 p.m. We had to share a room with other people. They didn't have private rooms. We had to wake up at 6:30 a.m. and then get the kids showered and dressed. At 9 a.m., they'd lock up the shelter and we were supposed to be out looking for a place to stay or a job.

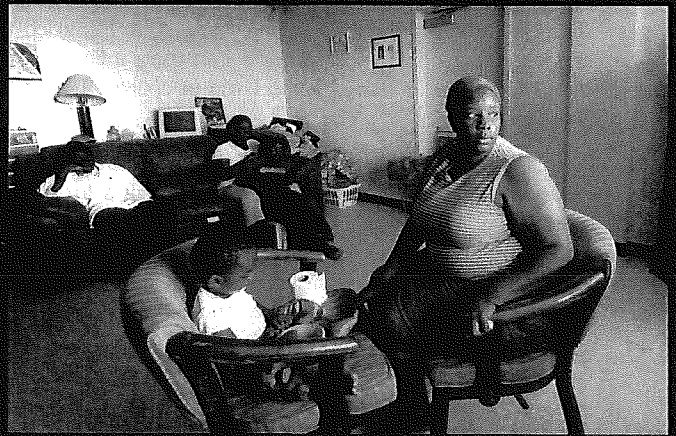
I was at the shelter from Dec. 31, 2008 until May 13, 2009. The shelter extended my stay once. You are supposed to leave after three months.

Finally, I got the call about our new place. We just moved into a two-year apartment. There are three bedrooms and it's spacious. I'm grateful. The kids are happy, too.

I am going back to school after I finish a 90-day program that the shelter referred me to that helps you to redirect your life. Right now, I am learning life skills, credit repair, money management and nutrition. Then I will go back to school to become a medical assistant and, after that, I plan to be trained as a nurse. I want to work with babies and pregnant women in labor and delivery.

I put my furniture and other belongings in storage before we moved into the shelter and we took only clothes with us. I got everything out of storage this month. Some of the boxes are still packed. The first thing that I did when I got my apartment was to take a bath. There are no baths at the shelter, only showers.

I learned what I needed to do to start over and to treat myself and my kids better. I want to see them grow up and be happy adults, finish school and go to college. I didn't go to college, but I did go back and I got my GED. I feel that this could have happened to anybody, whether you are poor or middle class. The economy is bad now. It doesn't matter who you are. This fall, the kids are going to new schools. It's a new start for all of us.



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the loner

NAME: Monty Milner, 55
LOCATION: Columbus, Ohio

'I didn't come this far to go back to the streets.'

I first got in touch with Briggsdale Apartments, which is a 24/7 shelter site in Columbus, while I was living in my car and out on the streets. Basically, I was not doing the right thing. The lady I was with periodically was pregnant. I didn't know that my son was mine, but I felt that he was.

I moved into Briggsdale and about two months later, I became a tenant rep. Basically, I helped the tenants talk to staff and helped the staff talk to tenants about the rules and regulations. A lot of people coming in from being homeless aren't used to rules and regulations. I'd leave one temporary job and take another. I did warehouse work. I operated a forklift. I also did production, shipping and receiving. I'm very skilled.

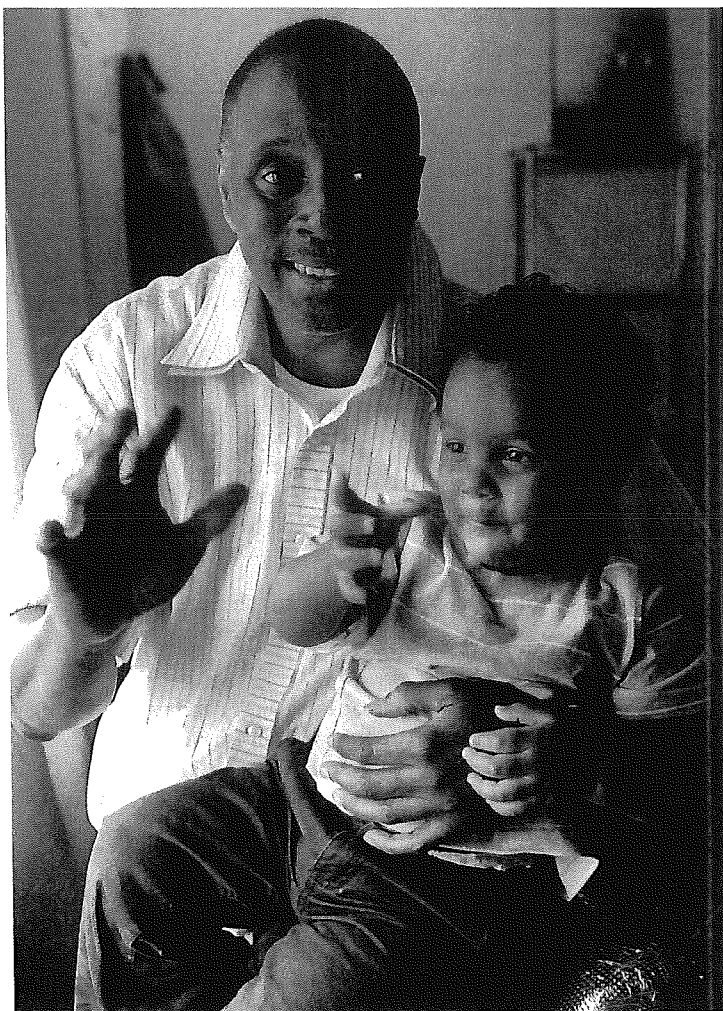
While I was living in Briggsdale, I realized that my son was my son. He was put in foster care right after he was born. The state needed confirmation that he was my son and they told me that I needed to pay for a DNA test. When my court date came, the judge said, "You have a man stepping up trying to be a father to his son. You all are trying to take his son away and adopt him out. I'm not doing that. Monty is trying to step up to be a man. I've got a whole caseload of guys who aren't trying to do anything."

So he gave me a schedule to see [my son]. The court gave me drug tests twice a week.

I had a problem with crack cocaine. I've been clean about three years. Drugs started for me by smoking weed. One thing led to another. Other people influenced me and I let them influence me. They didn't force me. It started while I was in college. I went to Central State University for a year.

I didn't finish because I wanted the fast life; I wanted to be among the people making fast money. I played basketball a lot. I was well-known. One day, someone who knew me wanted to buy some weed from me and that started me selling drugs. Good people and bad people smoke weed. That was the start of it. I did maintain my cars. I had a Bonneville, a Celica and a Buick Skylark.

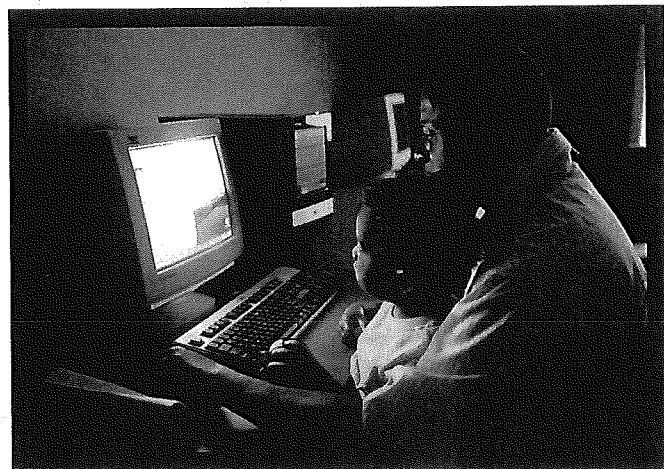
I met a guy [named] Larry. Everyone called him "Pops." He was a counselor who talked to people at the AA meetings who still drank or used drugs. If you were ready to quit, you'd go to him. If you

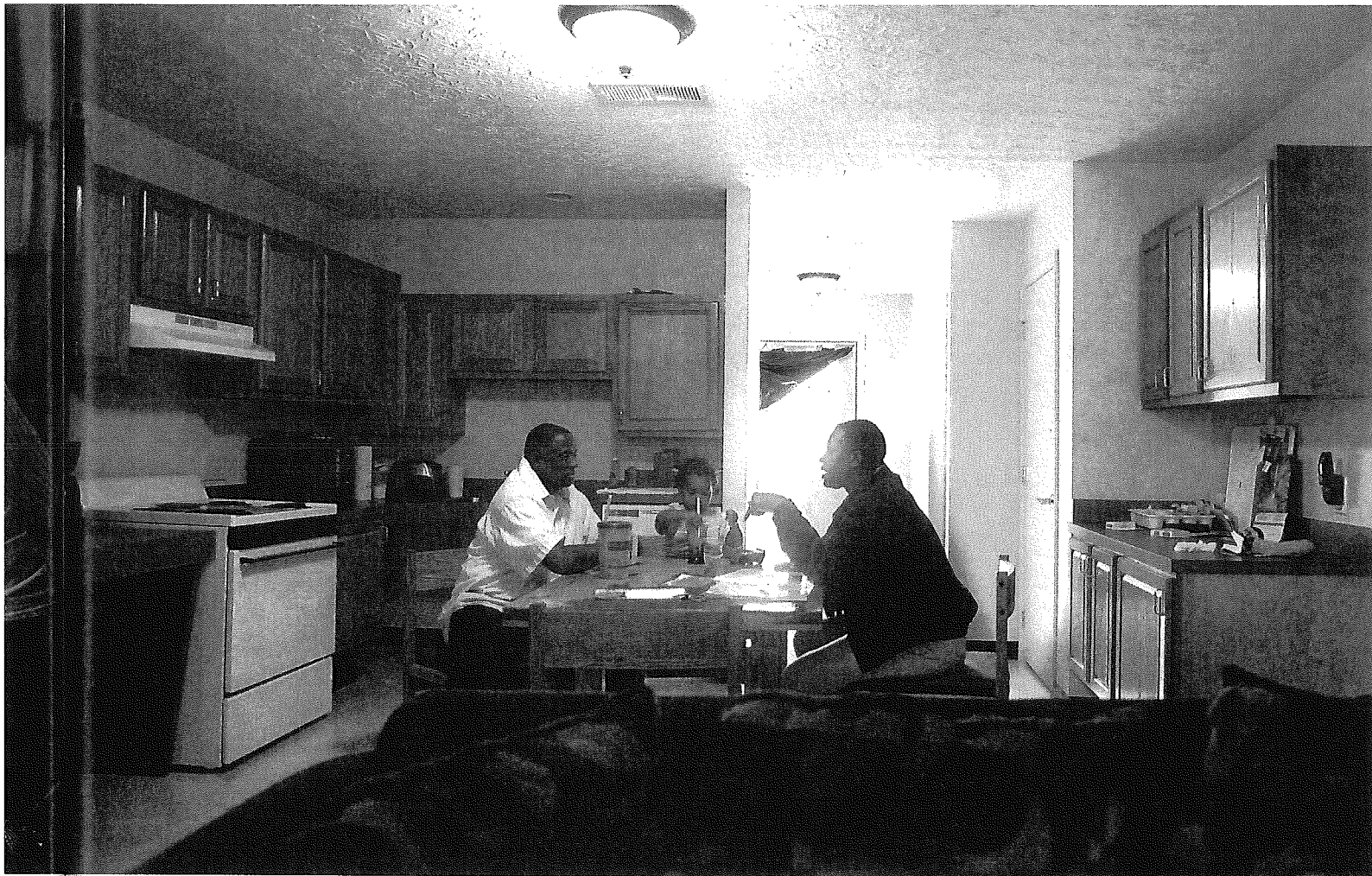


weren't ready to quit, you wouldn't go to him, which meant he'd lose the battle. We got real close and I really appreciate him for being there for me because he guided me through a lot when I was at Briggsdale. I stayed strong. Anytime I had a problem, I'd go to him.

My son being born, that is what really made me turn around. I was doing my one-hour weekly visits with him. Then they gave me weekend visits with my son.

Community Housing Network (CHN) has been there. I eventually moved in a housing unit for families because Briggsdale was for single people. I live in a nice townhouse and I pay my rent now because I am receiving welfare.





Monty Milner and 2-year-old Monty (left) share a father-son moment inside their home at Southpoint Place Apartments. In their kitchen (above), they meet with Kaiser Jones, a CHN employee. Later, Monty (below, left) takes advantage of the onsite computer room at Southpoint Place.

The main thing is that they don't put you back out on the street; they don't believe in that. That is defeating the purpose. You don't pay utilities. You're supposed to pay 30 percent of your income. I pay \$130 because I owe back rent. I normally pay two months in advance. On top of that, we have a computer room and a job-training program onsite. I would like to work in a warehouse or [doing] construction. I didn't come this far in overcoming my addiction just to go back to the streets.

I'm 55 with four children, ages 32, 29, 26 and 2. My goal is to provide for my [youngest] son. I want to be able to give him a DVD player. As far as clothes, he's fine. He likes Lightning McQueen and Big Bird and he has a lot of toys.

I now have custody of my son Monty. He is with the woman who was his foster mother during the day because she runs the day care he goes to. I need the help. She is allowing me to look for jobs.

I am going to get a job. I want one so bad that I'm hungry. One thing about CHN is that they keep the frustration of housing off of me. I see people who are losing their homes and they want to kill themselves. They don't know how it is to live in a shelter. Because I came from the streets, I know how to deal with that because I've been there.

HELPING TODAY'S HOMELESS

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 50 percent of the homeless population consists of families with children. Other groups that are currently experiencing homelessness include veterans, teenagers and domestic violence victims. There is help available. Here is a list of programs that can offer assistance to those who are in need.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Homelessness Resources

President Obama signed the ARRA on Feb. 17, 2009, which includes \$1.5 billion devoted to homelessness and re-housing.

For more information, go to www.hud.gov or www.recovery.gov

Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program

Operated by the Department of Education, this program ensures that homeless children can enroll in and attend school. They can also receive transportation services, tutoring, school supplies, domestic violence and health care services.

For more information, go to www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html

Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)

This program assists individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless. EFSP, which is operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, has a budget of \$100 million. It offers one-time monetary grants to distressed families.

For more information, contact the EFSP National Board at 703-706-9660 or go to www.efsp.unitedway.org/efsp/pages/email.htm

Transitional Housing Assistance Grants

To help women who are victims of domestic violence, the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) provides Transitional Housing Assistance Grants. The funds can be applied toward those women in need of transitional housing, short-term housing and other services.

For more information, call 202-307-6026 or go to www.ovw.usdoj.gov/housing_grant_desc.htm