

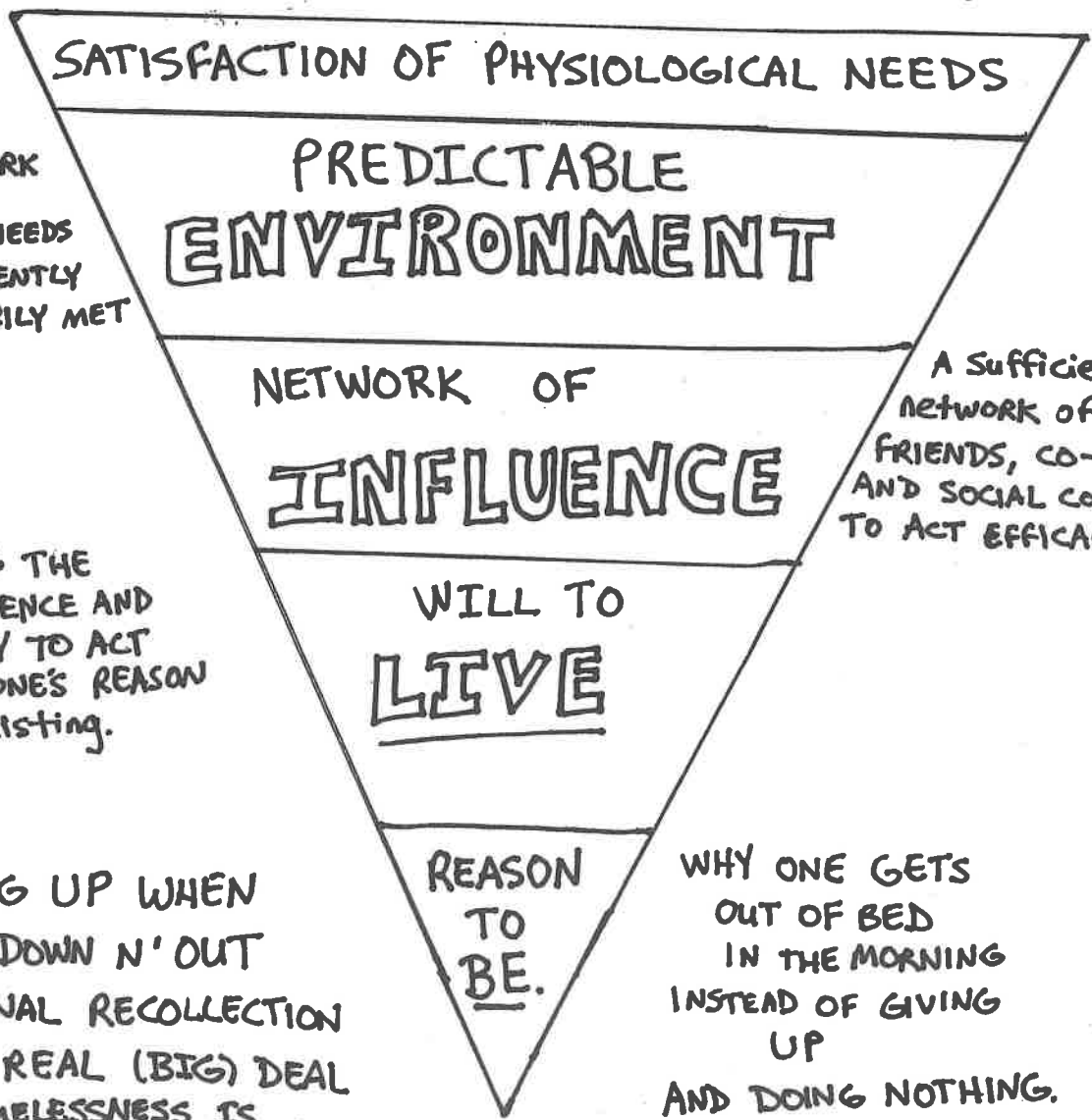
A HAPLESS CIRCUMSTANCE ought not make for a HOPELESS INDIVIDUAL.

UNWillingly
homeless

BY: COLBY
LYNCH



ENJOYING THE LUXURY OF A GOOD NIGHT'S REST,
COMFORTABLE CLOTHING, ADEQUATE SHELTER, CLEAN
AIR AND WATER AND A GOOD MEAL



ESTABLISHING A
STABLE FRAMEWORK
IN WHICH ONE'S
PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS
CAN BE CONSISTENTLY
AND SATISFACTORILY MET

HAVING THE
CONFIDENCE AND
BRAVERY TO ACT
UPON ONE'S REASON
TO EXISTING.

A sufficient
network of family
friends, co-workers
AND SOCIAL CONNECTION
TO ACT EFFICACIOUSLY

STAYING UP WHEN
YOU'RE DOWN N' OUT
~ A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION
OF THE REAL (BIG) DEAL
THAT HOMELESSNESS IS ...

WHY ONE GETS
OUT OF BED
IN THE MORNING
INSTEAD OF GIVING
UP
AND DOING NOTHING.

The system indeed needs work.

That is why I believe it's important to tell my story.

Through my lived experience as an unwittingly homeless individual, I have grown stronger and more resourceful in a lot of ways. This includes reaching out to folks and sharing the dark and foreboding side that is being caught up in this public crisis.

Underneath all of the upheaval that the pandemic aftermath has placed upon us, we are all in this together. At the end of the day, it could be one unfortunate circumstance that can lead to everything changing for an individual and the person(s) that they care for most. This reality is what I seek to drive home.

People that have read my manuscript make the point that writing my experiences down must have been a cathartic experience. Yes, a lot of soul searching and questioning of the system that we have in place here in Vermont has crossed my mind and come out in my thoughts.

It is the search for the comfort that a home provides that propels my fingers on the keyboard and keeps me hoping for a better tomorrow.

Please feel free to contact me regarding the contents of this manuscript. I can be reached at (802) 565-0250. Please text, as I get a lot of random "robo calls" cleverly disguised as local numbers.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colby Lynch', written in a cursive style.

Colby Lynch

Unwittingly Homeless

This homeless thing. I'm taking the pragmatic approach on this issue and listing you all just the facts. Pragmatic. I used to know that word, but it seems like I've forgotten how to use it, and what context to put it in.

If I'm not mistaken, it insinuates a nonjudgmental, reserved approach. The word popped into my head the other day as I was driving. I was on Route 14 headed towards Randolph, where I lived at one time.

I drove out this way, through Williamstown, thinking it would be a good day to get a Creemee at that place over by Pump N' Pantry. This spot of town I call amorously my "weak spot", as I have indulged from time to time in a soft serve creamsicle flavor cone, the creemee part dwarfing its crunchy container.

Seeing the empty picnic tables and folks overdressed somehow for the unseasonable weather perplexed me. The sun high in the sky reminded me of my friend Alison, and the fun things we liked to do in those eight months we were taking care of her.

Though we were still in the Pandemic over these months, I remember feeling much more safe and secure during these times, especially regarding my living situation. Those times seem like a long time ago, as everyday struggles often consume my very existence.

Here I was, enjoying the scenery that is pretty nice, even in "stick season". The day was November 3rd, and I had the window down and was enjoying the warm air (Thanks, Florida! ☺). I noticed however, that there were not too many other people out doing the same when I left Barre.

I overheard remarks that the weather was just "weird" and eerie, somehow. I was however, enjoying it, sucking up the last few hours of temperate climate that is comforting to my body. It is good for my mind to wander sometimes..

Out here I could fully ponder the situation that my longtime partner and best friend have been in now for over a year. It is indeed a different life. If you would have talked to me three years ago, I would not have projected that our lives would take on this vastly different direction. We had not expected, nor were we prepared for the reality that is being homeless.

You see, as homecare providers our jobs were to keep the people we cared for safe and happy. Tyler had been working with an agency out of Moretown for over a decade. He was great at "the job" of caregiving, which for some of us does not feel like a "job" at all...

I was relatively new to this kind of employment, though my background as a single parent for many years had encouraged my drive to keep a stable situation regarding my household status. With my son grown and on his own, I was seeking to settle down roots.

Even through the displacements that the Pandemic seemed to perpetuate, we were able to keep a decent routine for Alison. This daily routine included art time (my favorite), as well as healthy homecooked meals and established bedtimes. Essential emotional support was key in this, also. It was rewarding to me to wake up every day knowing that I was an important part of the lives of the people we were entrusted to look after.

A trip down "Memory Lane" is important, however the events that played out for my partner and I following Alison's stay with us is what I would like to focus on in this piece.

After the holiday season of 2020, Alison was moved into a transitional group home setting different than what we were able to provide for her. The seemingly never-ending health crisis that was Covid-19 had Alison desperately missing the in-home visits with her care team.

As she became escalated with feelings and moods that were impossible for her to process, she began to have a rough go of it. In many ways she was very self-aware of what her needs were. I was all on board for her to be transferred to a different facility that could better meet her needs.

Following Alison's departure, my partner and I took on a different person to work with that did not live with us. At the time we were doing respite work, myself undergoing the planning for an agency garden project. All was going smoothly, however our living situation became a precarious one. The owner of the house we were renting (to the tune of \$1600.00 per month) had plans to sell the property and needed to fix it up. I was hoping that we could continue staying there through this transition, but that was not the case.

We had been given a notice to vacate within three months. At this time, we really didn't think it was that big of a deal, other than the arduous task of moving our belongings during "mud season", of course. We ended up securing a room for rent that we found on Front Porch Forum. The woman who returned our call gushed to me about how beautiful the farmhouse was that her daughter owned. I was slightly amused by how excited she was for new tenants. She didn't seem particularly "Vermonty" given her braggy saleslady approach to the situation. I was spot-on in that, as she still had a (978) area code personal phone number. I went with it, though, the price was right (\$600 per month). My partner and I would have no trouble coming up with that amount of money as respite work can pay fairly well.

We moved into the farmhouse on May 1st, 2021. This was when some of our troubles began. I outlined this experience in the piece that I wrote "Homeless and Living In a Van" that was picked up by the Herald. You can read this article, as I have attached it to this manuscript. Right now, I want to focus on where we are at now (Quality Inn in Barre), over a year after taking shelter there in this one room space with two beds and a bathroom connected.

Most importantly, I want to stress to folks the reality that motel rooms are for vacations or weekend excursions, not everyday life. When my partner and I moved in on November 4th, 2021 we were just glad to be somewhere warm and not living in our vehicles. If this article gets a bit much to bear, please forgive me, as I'm just attempting to recount the reality to the best of my ability.

When you are living in a vehicle and the temperatures are getting down to 28 degrees, it is a life changing experience. I have not fully recovered from the emotional toll that the experience took on me. I am grateful for the lady who reached out to me when I posted our story on the Hunger Mountain Coop Community Board. She allowed me to use her camp stove so that I could boil some water and correctly put away my garden goods for the winter. Food preparation is something that was once more than a hobby to me. I used to take pride in the ability to grow food and can it properly. When I had a kitchen (which until now, was my whole life) I was quite the entertainer with elaborate meals that were the outcome of my garden growing ventures. Enough about that, though...

In the motel room we have a microwave and a one pot coffee maker. The drawers to keep the clothing were all busted before we moved in. I keep my clothing in the armoire and in laundry baskets stacked up on top of each other. It is quite the ordeal to put together a simple matching outfit sometimes. These days, I work with the public waiting tables and bartending. Wearing dirty, ill fitting, or damaged clothing is not good looks on my part.

If I can do anything well, I can explain to you the systemic oppression and silent treatment that is taken toward homeless people in general. Unwanted and misunderstood, their possessions become baggage that must be guarded by their owners from thieves and others that are in their same boat.

Any belongings that they hold dear, or collections that they keep are considered "hoarding". No longer do they have the status of a simply "eccentric" person. When you're out there on your own, looking for somewhere to just "be", you are taking up space that "belongs" to someone else. You don't "own" anything, and can't afford "a place somewhere". Therefore, you are "crazy". Existing "that way" is insanity in the public eye.

I can tell you about "that way" from lived experience. "That way" is having to pee in yogurt containers while sleeping in your vehicle when the temperatures are dropping by the hour. "That way" is cranking the heat and wasting precious fuel every few hours in order to keep the blood circulating in your legs.

"That way" is driving around with a cooler in your car that has to be dumped out and topped off every few hours with ice from your restaurant job. "That way" is necessary, no kitchen is available for cooking, and the motel ice maker has been out of service for weeks. The fridge in the motel room is not designed for heavy use and ices up completely, ruining the food. Made for Chinese takeout boxes, and maybe a six pack of cans, it is not supposed to keep behind its door a household's grocery cache.

If the true definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results than yes, the housing situation in Vermont is an insanity. This situation has not only made me more resourceful, but more attuned to my neighbors in need, who are living in the motel alongside us. Many of these individuals have serious health issues, and no car to get them around town.

The challenges that many of them face far surpass mine, I may add. One can be proactive in changing the scenery if their mind is capable of seeing the options available to them, and going from there. When did sufficient shelter options for working people who are doing their best to contribute to society and play fair become such a non-priority? From my standpoint now, all that has been happening is data collection on the part of the State, reactionary measures from the public, and stereotypes promulgating the issue at large.

My partner and I are not burdens, we are people. Homelessness. From the pragmatic approach, there is nothing cushy or redeeming about the subject. The cheery Santa dressed up ringing the bell for donations is much more well received than the homeless guy who just needs to use the bathroom.

It seems like people only want to hear the "after" story. Nobody likes hearing about the purgatory that is living in limbo, at the mercy of the State and rapidly dwindling funds. Days pass and it becomes increasingly harder surviving and maintaining composure. Struggling to maintain a generally positive attitude toward life.

The end game is always far away. Like running a marathon it takes every shred of human potential mentally, emotionally, physically. People ask constantly, "what are you going to do?". When a person's livelihood and place of dwelling is taken away, the reproach on their existence is real.

Back when the bottom had fallen out for us, I was seeking to right the wrongs. Human decency goes a long way, and this includes hearing both sides to any given story. I reached out to Front Porch Forum in Randolph through a letter outlining our experience with our previous landlord.

Citing an increase in divisiveness between neighbors following the Pandemic, an administrator from Front Porch Forum (Randolph) politely declined to post my commentary. She followed up her decision to decline with a "Feel Good" story about neighbors coming together to help a woman with household items, food, etc...when she found a place in the community. This example of "acceptable content", though touching, actually made me feel worse.

Here I was, carting my belongings off and into a storage shed and locking the door. Hastily reminding myself that a lot of stuff would likely be ruined by mice and mold, and that I had only been able to secure a few plastic totes for the precious items. It was this barb of jealousy that nearly sent me over the edge, the proverbial fabric of a comfortable scarf in the making, if you will, becoming unraveled by the second. I don't even like writing about this, the way I still feel about ever having a place again to call my own just makes me so sad...

When I saw this Homeless Day of Action taking place, I knew it was time to act. Regarding my partner and my situation, I am no stranger to telling the truth. I shouldn't have to plead my case here like I've done something wrong in all of this.

The state housing crisis affects us all, so what good is it to "pull rank", if you will because of a situation that requires a holistic approach? The reality is clear. If this great need for unavailable housing persists, Vermont will lose a lot of good workers.

I must admit I love my job these days, get along great with my co-workers, and enjoy the fun atmosphere of the bowling alley. I have been working at Twin City Family Fun Center for over a year. Though it keeps the car on the road and basic needs met, I am not quite "gainfully" employed at this time, as it is impossible to be a homeless homecare provider.

A little bit of solace that I did find during this ordeal came through a group of individuals who camped out on the State House steps when the motel program was in jeopardy. Our newly apparent needs at the time coincided with the protest. During this time, the Herald printed my article about living in our vehicles, and Vermont Digger followed up with our story.

It is comforting to me to know that there are those who hold public office that do truly care. That being said, I shouldn't have to feel like I'm violating community standards just by simply existing. In a time where emojis suffice as feelings and status is top concern, "put the high boots on" action is what we need to doing here. At this stage in life I'm focused on settling down. I'm seeking to become a citizen of a community rather than someone "just passing through" because of their living circumstance.

If I'm ever seeking to shorten my lifespan by at least ten years, then living out of doors during one of our winters seems a viable option. I've been through times in my life where I have been able to thrive. I've been behind the lines on many an occasion, putting my helping hands to work.

These days though, the weariness of the situation has my spirits draining rapidly, like the booze in the bottle of an alcoholic. That being said, its been a long time since I've picked up a drink. I still know that I'm a physically and mentally strong individual, capable of a lot of good. I'm mother to a grown boy, a visionary artist, and a worthy confidante. I enjoy a good laugh, even at the expense of myself sometimes. But having no place to live is no laughing matter... The debasing stereotypes toward the homeless need to be eradicated from public dissent. Frankly, it's embarrassing to me.

Perhaps the day will come when I can look back and chuckle at the desperation behind emptying my middle-aged bladder into a Fage yogurt container in the dead of the early morning freezing my ass off in the car because the water pump in the van shit the bed.

Or waiting in anticipation for the dreaded “cop knock” on the van window assaulting my precious sleep just to make sure “everything” is O.K. One day will come when I’m able to stretch out on my couch again, or have access to a table to do my art on in my own space.

Until then, I’m stuck hunched over in our motel bathroom using the tub to wash our dishes or making use of the cherished flat space on the walls of the tub to cut my clay up on. The “over the moon” feeling that I had when we moved into the motel is eclipsed by the anxiety that is the nagging fear that we are not going to be able to find a place locally when the clock runs out.

For right now, I’m feeling overlooked, downtrodden, and exasperated about this ongoing situation. Sure, it’s a warm place in the winter, I enjoy the comfy bed and the good sleep that I’m able to get now. But to think that can be taken away soon haunts me somehow.

Family members have noticed that I’ve lost that “warm and fuzzy” persona and carefree attitude that they have all grown to love. In the past, I adopted a “change is good” attitude while embarking on new challenges. “Change is good” is replaced by an exhausting survival mode after a while. One would think that surviving can turn into “thriving” if one has the determination and the hard work ethic required to make their reality better and see some results. I use this mindset in the gym and see results, I use this mindset in the workplace, and see results in what people leave me for tips.

This homeless thing though. Trying to make sense of this is not very productive, and I believe that relentless misery is a personal choice. Hapless circumstances shouldn’t mean hopeless. I’m moving forward in my art ventures, and have been creating small works of art through all of this.

My pieces these days focus less on the panoramic vistas that I put into clay form when we lived out in the sticks. Losing scratch tickets and empty beer cans and the overflowing dumpster behind the motel do not consume my surroundings, though my mind seems more cluttered these days than what I can remember. A situation can be debasing and destabilizing, but only demoralizing if one chooses it to be. I have made a few friends at the motel, though I am careful who I associate with. Grit and candor and I like to think wisdom has pulled me through this experience thus far. I only wish to use my testimony as a way of addressing issues, acting and moving forward.

The words of Eleanor Roosevelt have become clear to me in these chaotic times: “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent”. I will end on this note...

10/19/21

Colby Lynch
c/o Another Way
125 Barre St
Montpelier, VT
05602

The Herald
30 Pleasant Street
Randolph, VT
05060

Dear Editor(s),

I am writing to you today to raise awareness to the issue of homelessness in Vermont. I can't say that I have ever been in this position before, so if I skip around a bit please excuse the chaos.

Attached is the experience that my boyfriend and I have been through that led us to staying in our van in a parking lot. It is not drugs, or mental illness, or other issues that everyday people may assume. The conundrum is that I have looked into help to get us back into a roof over our heads and the struggle has been difficult.

For the last few months I have been following the outcomes of the Vermont Statehouse decisions regarding the hotel voucher program being extended. A lot of the folks receiving the vouchers have been receiving help since Covid-19 gripped communities worldwide.

Governor Scott's decisions to extend the voucher program was equated to the game "kick the can" recently in a local newspaper editorial. It appears to me at this time that individuals need to be elderly, have dependent children or "one on the way", disabled, or in the mental health system in order to receive a hand up while they are houseless.

I am an "able-bodied" middle aged woman. My son is grown and on his own. I work a full time job providing a vocational program for a disabled person through gardening. At this time, I should be focusing my efforts on the greenhouse project that is in store for our agency this winter.

In my free time I have been bringing awareness to the homeless issue in Vermont. It is going to get cold soon, and living outside and in parking lots could be fatal to some folks, even "able-bodied" ones. I have noticed that there are community drives going on to obtain supplies such as tents, warm clothes, etc... for those living outdoors. This is helpful and the intention behind it is in the right place, but right now we need active community action and advocacy.

Some of us, myself included, need better options than a nod at the situation and identification that there is a housing crisis going on here. Basic shelter is a human right, and quite frankly, it scares me when I consider that my boyfriend and I could wind up "statistics" frozen in a van in a parking lot! We are both doing our best right now to fix our situation. I am aware that the rental market is scarce right now, and I have called around to different agencies in the area such as Capstone Community Services, the Economic Services Division, and looked into the VERAPS program for relocation.

In closing, I thank you for your time in reading about our experience. I have attached "Currently Living in a Van". If so inclined, you may edit it for publication.

Sincerely,



Currently Living in Our Van

By Colby Lynch

Hi Neighbors! Autumn is upon us and the time is right to enjoy. In previous years we would be enjoying pumpkin carving and hayrides, but these days my boyfriend and I are finding ourselves in a most precarious situation.

Not too long ago, we were living in a home with other roommates that was in no condition to be rented out. The location of this house was Randolph Center, Vermont. We moved in May first of this year. All seemed well (beautifully decorated and very old farmhouse). The lack of electronic devices including a television set or computer, along with the esthetics had me charmed, I must admit...

The façade, however was purely glossed-over problems. We learned by July that there would be trouble in the future. Between the standing water/mold in the basement, patches of black mildew in our upstairs closet, space heaters everywhere (that were later removed by the landlords), the writing was on the wall. Literally.

The gas stove would tick for a minute when turned on and "blow up" when the burners were lit. It was quite obvious it was a fire hazard, and I made it my duty to warn other tenants when they moved in about the situation. The landlord was notified, and blew the whole thing off like it wasn't any big deal. Tenants were startled when there was an occasional loud bang when the oven was turned on. The stove finally quit altogether one day. This was brought to the attention of the landlord, who assured us that a new stove was on its way. In short, we were stuck over a month with no way to cook our meals. No hot plates were offered to us, we merely bought our own.

It was a difficult situation to say the least. When we moved in, no lease was ever assigned. I was told that the room we were to rent out was \$600 by the "acting maintenance guy" that lived there previously. When I addressed this price to the landlord and the wallet came out, it was a different story. We were told that we were getting a "good deal" on the upstairs master bedroom for \$660 per month. I offered to do the yardwork and to grow a garden.

These things I accomplished. The rug was pulled out from underneath us in August, a few days after we paid our rent. On August 4th, I was given a "verbal notice" with an apology attached. We were asked to leave because the landlord was moving back in and needed our bedroom.

One of the other bedrooms was being vacated by a young man who was going back to school. I brought up a point that we could move across the hall. I was told that they didn't "make it a habit to rent to couples". A couple moved into above mentioned room on the same day that the young man left. All in all, the whole situation was handled very poorly and unprofessionally.

None of the other tenants were asked to leave.

It was an awkward phone conversation. The "verbal notice" was that we had sixty (60) days to vacate the premises. We were already living there, having settled in in May. I stressed this point to no avail. Reasonable accommodations could have been made for us. I explained to the landlord fruitlessly that we didn't have a Plan B in place. The decision was being made for us to displace two individuals that work with disabled people, and the animal that they have cared for eight years.

Profuse apologies and empty promises do nothing to soothe my aching neck. And they certainly don't take away the seatbelt prints on my ass from being cramped up sleeping in a back seat night after night.

Living in a van is hard, and it's only been two weeks! I've handled the situation with grace, though it was difficult not to be upset...Vermonters are hardy folks who look out for each other. The treatment that we received when we were living in that awful situation was anything but.

It is also worth a mention that the landlord sought US out on Front Porch Forum back in March when our old landlord was selling his house. We were forthright in announcing that we were a couple with a cat looking for a place. The whole situation was initiated by the landlord reaching out to us, not the other way around!

At the end of our "tenancy", or whatever that was, the landlord was barely speaking to us. She took the low road and never followed up with me about possible places that we could go after October 4th. I feel "used" by these people for the nice months of the year. I take pride in my work, including yardwork as an art form. I kept the lawn looking like a golf course to attract prospective renters.

It is extremely challenging to seek out resources and work a full time job at the same time. I have found out the hard way that there was no housing insecurity safety net for us when we found out we were being made to leave.

I understand the laws, and what the landlord did was illegal. Staying put, however was not an option. In closing, I am going to ask if anyone has any leads please reach out. My e-mail is lanternlady2020@outlook.com. We both work in the Mad River Valley in Moretown. With our income we can afford \$900.00 per month. We require two parking spaces. No pets. We had to part ways with our sweet cat Muffy and give him to our old roommate.

As part of my Vocational Program for the agency where I work, I have maintained a full garden. I have harvest coming in that needs to be jarred. So if anyone has a stove that I could use for an afternoon, that would be much appreciated too. Thank you for reading this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colby Lynch', written in a cursive style.

Colby Lynch



Tyler Vandenberg and Colby Lynch open the door to their room at the Quality Inn in Barre. The couple have been sleeping in their van for weeks and were admitted into the state's general assistance housing program on Wednesday, Nov. 3. Photo by Mike Dougherty/VTDigger

'Over the moon'

<https://vtdigger.org/2021/11/05/bermuda-triangle-vermonters-experiencing-homelessness-face-challenges-getting-help/>

The first thing Tyler Vandenberg noticed when he opened the door to his new motel room: "It's warm."

SHOP



Colby Lynch and Tyler Vandenbergh get the keys to their room at the Quality Inn in Barre. Photo by Mike Dougherty/VTDigger

Lynch described the couple as “housing insecure.” They were living in a run-down home in Randolph until their landlord told them in August they would need to leave. She immediately started looking for housing options but could not find anything before they were displaced last month. The van seemed like their best option while they searched for a plan B.

“It was harder every day. Then, we thought we might be sleeping in here for months. And then it started getting scary,” Vandenbergh said.

Their first application for the hotel program had been denied, in part, Lynch said, because she did not have the proper paper trail, such as written eviction notices. As they searched for their next place to live, she said the cold kept them from sleeping and took a real toll on their mental health.

For Lynch, it’s gotten harder each night to keep depression at bay.

“I do the best I can, but it’s a whole ‘nother level when you’re living in a vehicle,” she said.

Knowing they could come home to a motel room each night would change that, they said.

“I’m over the moon right now,” Lynch said in the parking lot.

“I feel like we’re actually going to move forward now,” Vandenbergh said. “Just the support alone. Like, even if we knew it was a week away — just the indefinite not knowing, that’s the scariest part.”

Early 2021- Me in our kitchen holding some garden goods I canned.



Summer 2022- My son Raven and I at the gym smashing goals





Homegrown without a home. Pictured above are my lantern panels (hand-dyed translucent fimo clay)

**I THINK ARTISTS HAVE
A UNIQUE VOICE IN
ADDRESSING DESPAIR
AND SAYING WE CAN DO BETTER
THAN WE'RE DOING.**



for taking time to read my story.

- Colby 😊