



Gatherings

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New beginnings and new dreams: Karin's story

In 2010, Karin began to dream about her future again. Her dream, she says, included living in her own apartment with a window—a window with sheer curtains blowing gently in the breeze, lit by the glow of beautiful candles in the room.

As she begins 2011, Karin is one step closer to realizing that dream. On Christmas Eve 2010, she moved into her own apartment—an apartment with a window—at The Colburn, a subsidized apartment complex that is part of the Denver's Road Home program. Karin has candles and knows the sheer curtains will become a reality soon. Getting to this point, though, has been a difficult journey.

"A lot of things happen in people's lives," says Karin as she begins to tell her story. Born in Denmark, she moved to Colorado with her family at age 6. She graduated from Niwot High School, married, and had two daughters.

But, at age 36, she says, everything fell apart. Her mother passed away, her husband finished medical school, and shortly thereafter, she and he divorced. The next year she began a new relationship and quit her job to go back to school. Then she became pregnant with her son, and, during the pregnancy, developed blethrosplasms, a painful neurological disorder that caused her eyelids to close.

"I was blind for three years," Karin says. "During that time, I became addicted to pain medication and my life just spiraled out of control."

Their family moved to Nevada, but eventually Karin's second husband left her, and her son decided to live with him. Karin returned to Colorado in 2009 to live with her youngest daughter, but their relationship quickly deteriorated and she made the difficult decision to go to a shelter.

"Never in my wildest dreams had I thought I would wind up in a shelter," says Karin, who came to realize that many at Brandon Center shared experiences similar to hers.

"I was always the caretaker," she explains. "I just didn't take care of myself and my own needs."

Karin soon heard about The Gathering Place from other women at Brandon Center and decided to check things out and have lunch. "It was so beautiful here," she says. "You didn't feel 'different' just because you were homeless."

The Gathering Place's Talking Circle group became Karin's weekly "counseling" session and she was

introduced to Debra MacKillop, our Housing Stabilization Advocate. Debra helped her apply for housing at Warren Village's First Step, a program that serves women and families seeking to resolve significant barriers to obtaining permanent housing.

"First Step was finally a home," says Karin, who moved into the residence on Feb. 17, 2010. "By having a place to live that was stable, I was able to start school."

Karin began taking classes at Community College of Denver over the summer and enrolled full time for the fall semester. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in accounting and made the Dean's List last semester.

Through the year, Karin worked to rebuild her relationships with her children and estranged husband in Nevada, as well. "When I lived with my daughters, the roles were reversed," she says. "Now they are calling me again for advice." Her son also came to visit this summer. "We had the best day together," she says. "He got to see that I wasn't sad anymore."

As Karin starts this new year in her own apartment, she is beginning to dream new dreams for her future. She wants to continue to do well in school and is planning to purchase a computer this year and start saving for a car.

"2010 was—in terms of personal growth and realizing my own potential—probably the most important year of my life," she says. "I have a life full of wonderful things, and not material things: friendship, love, and understanding. And I didn't used to dream, but I've learned how to do that again."



Moving to her own apartment on Christmas Eve was, "the best gift I've ever received," Karin says.