

Against the Odds: LaRena's Story of Resilience and Sacrifice May 2024



Few bonds compare to the unconditional love between a mother and her children, as shown by this inspiring story of single mother, LaRena. Having experienced homelessness multiple times throughout her life, LaRena's journey demonstrates perseverance as she overcame each grueling challenge that faced her, all for the sake of her children.

LaRena had a difficult childhood, growing up in a rather unstable household. She recalls being on the receiving end of her mother's aggressive outbursts and feeling resentment towards her father, who she claims never tried to intervene. For a while LaRena found peace living with her grandmother, but that was eventually taken away from her when her grandmother suddenly passed away. Despite experiencing such traumas as a child, LaRena found strength within herself and decided to leave her parent's house when she was 15. It was a difficult choice for LaRena, one that would leave her homeless for the next several years, but one she felt like she needed to make nonetheless.

Living on the streets proved mentally and emotionally taxing on LaRena. She lost her job after having a mental breakdown at work and struggled to get back on her feet again. Social security income was not enough for LaRena to secure a place to live, leaving her uncertain of the future. To make matters worse, anxieties, trust issues, and fear flooded her mind after an incident where she was sexually assaulted. Life seemed to be dealing every bad card to LaRena and she felt like there was no way out. With depressive thoughts closing in around her, LaRena made a drastic decision to drive her car into a tree at 70 miles per hour. She did not expect to see tomorrow...but she did.

After the incident, LaRena slowly began putting the pieces of her life back together. She found care in a mental health facility and had two sons, who gave her a newfound motivation to live. Her sons were her whole world, and she wanted nothing but the best for them, but she still did not have enough money to afford a place to live. After couch surfing for a few years, she decided it was best for her and her youngest son to move back in with her father who was recently divorced. Her oldest son did not move in with them, as he was attending college and working in Sacramento at the time.

Despite LaRena's hope that her family home might finally be a safe haven, her father began to show symptoms of schizophrenia and dementia. Some days he would forget who LaRena was and treat his own daughter like an intruder. Other times he would call for his wife who was no longer there. LaRena's childhood home proved yet again to be unsafe. Eventually, the home was foreclosed on, but LaRena, her father, and her youngest son still resided in the foreclosed structure for weeks since they had nowhere else to go. During this time, LaRena found herself in another difficult position. She pitied her father whose mental state was clearly on a downhill slope, yet she felt the need to protect her son from the dangerous environment her father was creating.



That is when she heard of Habitat for Humanity Yuba/Sutter and decided to reach out for help. After listening to LaRena's story, our case managers worked quickly to find LaRena affordable housing and were able to place her in one of our affordable housing developments. Once construction had been completed, LaRena was handed the keys to her brand new home.

"I didn't think it was real at first" she thought to herself during the walkthrough of her home.

Brand new appliances, running water, and most importantly a safe, quiet neighborhood was everything and more that LaRena could have hoped for in her new home. She teared up at the thought of having spent so many years feeling as though she couldn't provide the life she wanted for her sons and now she finally has a secure, stable home for them to come back to. Her oldest son is still living in Sacramento as he finishes college but plans to visit LaRena and his brother again soon. Her youngest is achieving A's and B's at Lindhurst High School while he strives for a scholarship in Sports Medicine. Today, LaRena continues to focus on her son's well-being while also attending therapy to improve her own mental health.



Despite all the hardships she endured, LaRena's love for her children motivated her to keep going. If there's any lesson to be gained from LaRena's story it's that with determination, support, and a focus on what truly matters, it is possible to overcome even the most difficult situations. We can't express how proud we are of LaRena for the resilience she displayed and we are so glad to welcome her home! Thank you LaRena for being an inspiration to us all.

If you or anyone you know is struggling with their mental health, call or text 988 for help.

