

Anton's Story

After countless hours of talking with homeless men over many years, I fell into the trap of defining homeless men by three characteristics

- he is the product of a broken relationship
- he is addicted or has been addicted to something, and
- he smokes cigarettes

Although it may be a poor choice of words, I was delighted this morning to speak with a man who defies my long-held description of the homeless man.

Anton has never been married and has no children. He is not alcoholic and does not use drugs, and he does not smoke cigarettes. He is the horse of a different color.

Click the link below to learn more about this St. Francis Shelter staff member.

Anton is approaching his third anniversary of service with the St. Francis Shelter. There are only two others who can claim that length of tenure. Many are called, but few are chosen.

Born in Bermuda an Air Force 'brat,' Anton returned to the United States when his father was transferred to Davis-Monthan AFB in the 60s. He is 56-years old and has lived his entire life in Tucson. Anton and his younger brother attended the Canyon del Oro school system and he graduated from CDO high school in 1982.

If there is a broken relationship in his life, it is the divorce of his parents, but Anton was 18-years old when that happened, and he remembers his childhood as a good one.

Anton is a tall 6'4" man who prefers to enjoy the moment and not rush life or through life. Perhaps that is why his preferred choice of transportation is a bicycle. He describes himself as strong, determined and stubborn. "I tend to be resistant to change," he says and comments, "that may explain why I've lived my entire life in Tucson. I have no desire to move to another town."

It may also explain his affinity to 'classic television' like "Green Acres," "I Dream of Jeanie," "Andy Griffith" and shows from that era. "Life was simpler then," Anton comments, "and those shows remind me of better times. I am not into special effects."



Anton is fond of the quote, "Wish in one hand, shit in the other. See which one gets filled first." His challenging life tends to influence Anton to take the more practical side.

Following high school, Anton apprenticed as a plumber but when the opportunity vanished, he spent time as a landscaper. That led to opportunities in general contracting where he found steady work for many years. During those good years of the early millennium, Anton saved his money and purchased a small trailer. He was pleased to have a place of his own, but things changed in 2015.

In 2015, the owner of the small contracting company Anton worked for contemplated retirement, and as he did, he decided to reduce his workforce. Anton's number was called. The owner assured him he would be able to draw unemployment for a year. It did not last that long. Anton secured small side jobs for a while, but they did not provide him enough income to pay his rent. In the broiling summer of 2015, Anton lost his trailer and became a homeless man.

Life in the Rillito Wash was miserable. There was no relief from the sweltering heat that descends upon the desert like a heavy hammer on an unforgiving anvil. He took his meals from local churches who understood their obligation to help the homeless. He found shelter as best he could. His bicycle gave him mobility but no income.

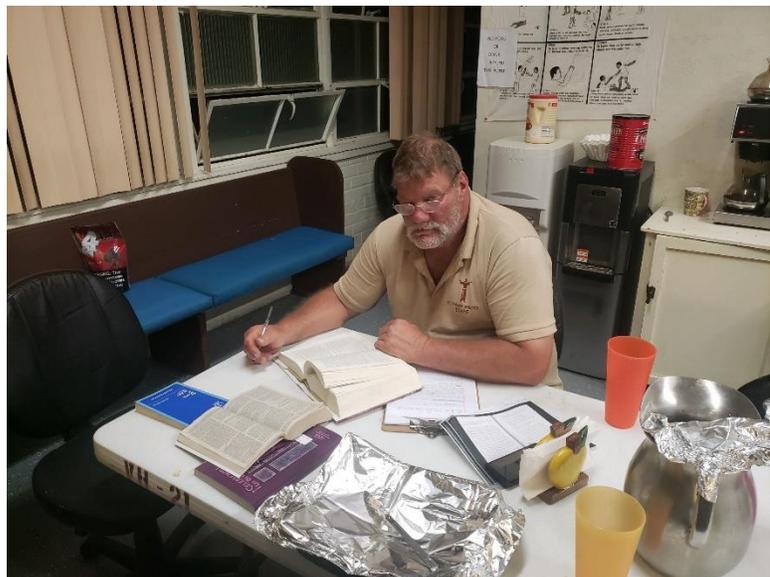
Two years later and somehow managing to survive, a homeless brother told him he could get a sandwich at the St. Francis Shelter, which at that time offered cooling in the intense summer months. He took the advice and made his way to the St. Francis Shelter. Carl took a liking to Anton and offered him a staff position, but Anton turned the offer down.

A few days later after an altercation with an ex-girlfriend, Anton found himself in jail for 42 days to be exact. Those days ended up being like Jesus's 40 days in the desert. During those days of incarceration, Anton concluded he had to make a change in his life. He could not decide which was worse, jail time or street time, but he knew he did not want either.

Released from jail after 42 days in the summer of 2017, Anton returned to the St. Francis shelter and asked Carl if the position was still open. He asked for a second chance, and Carl gave it to him. Anton has been a member of the staff ever since.

After three years on staff at the shelter, Anton says, "Life is good. I have money in my pocket, and I have a driver's license for the first time in 20 years." Friends of St. Francis Sue Allan and Chuck Dunn are very instrumental in assisting

staff members with legal situations that may have plagued them in the past. Anton's duties include security and lock up every evening. He moves furniture for the thrift store and performs pickup for donors. Most importantly, Anton serves as the treasurer of the St. Francis Shelter, a role that demonstrates the trust and confidence that the shelter has in him, and Anton takes that responsibility very seriously.



Somewhat of a loner, Anton considers an old junior high classmate, Jeff as his best friend. “Jeff moved to Iowa 16 years ago. He is married now with a family, but we still stay in touch. Recently, Jeff moved back to Tucson, and we’re looking forward to getting back together as soon as the quarantine restrictions are lifted.” Friends are a good thing to have.

Occasionally, he will encounter a homeless person he remembers from his years in the wash. “I always say ‘hello,’ and I always share what I have no matter how little because I know I have more than they do.”

Anton works hard to keep a positive attitude about everything. “I don’t over-think things,” he explains. “I don’t worry about what may or may not happen in the future. I have to live in the moment. If I don’t worry about tomorrow, good things are certain to happen.”

With that said, Anton is not blind to the future. “My mom lives in Michigan and cares for my grandfather. When her duties there are over, I’m encouraging her to move back to Tucson. We’ll buy or rent a small place, and I’ll take care of her like she takes care of my grandfather.” Caregiving is a full-time job. “I will never forget the shelter, and Carl is my friend, but my priority will be my mother.”

Anton is quick to say that the St. Francis Shelter has made him a better version of himself. “I am more reliable since moving into the shelter,” he says, “and I am more responsible about money and other things. When I’m asked to do something, I get it done. I was not always so quick to acknowledge my responsibilities.” Religion was never an important part of Anton’s upbringing, and he is thankful for the exposure that he receives daily at the shelter. “I’ve learned a lot, particularly about Catholicism. Moving forward, God will always be a part of my life.”