

Captions :

A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD

Photographic essay by
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 France 2010 – 2012

Photos 01



01 A



01 B



01 C

My name is Daniel. I'm a bipolar manic-depressive. My mother was too. When I was a child, she used to hit me for no reason. My father left home before long. I didn't know him that well. My two sisters were placed in a foster family.

I got married in 1980. But the problem is that I used to beat my wife. It was just beyond my control. I went crazy beating her. Afterwards I was paralysed by the shame of it. She left. She was right. I had two boys but they don't want to see me anymore. I would love to write to them. But I can't do it. In 1992, I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. When I came out, I was homeless. So I took the train for Paris. I came across the association « les petits frères des Pauvres ». They helped me get welfare payments, a medical card, and a disability allowance.

I live in a 12m² bedsit. I have neither hot water nor heating. I pay 500 euros per month to a rogue landlord. I know I'm being robbed on but I have no choice. It's either that or live on the street. My dignity depends on it.

I don't go out much. I'm ashamed of what I have become. In the morning I eat at « les petits frères des Pauvres », and in the evening, in my room. I find it hard to manage the daily routine. Everything is a problem. I take loads of tablets. I'd love to have projects, to be like everyone else. For the moment I'm not ready. I asked to be moved to an old people's home. I need help to get back on my feet. **Daniel**

Photos 02



02 A



02 B



02 C

My name is Gérard. I don't want people to know who I am nor where I live. I have no family. My life has always been rough. Now I'm handicapped. I've been living in my flat for the past seven years. I feel well there. I do what I like. It's my home. I have a roof, my keys, my letterbox.

It gets really cold in winter. I have blankets. No problem. I find it hard to walk. I don't complain. Others are worse off. I like to be alone. During the day I watch television with my cat. On Tuesdays, I go to « les petits frères » because Suzanne is there. She is really kind to me. We go out and take the bus. No-one knows my past. I keep it to myself. I want people to forget me. I'm ok for the photos. That's all. **Gérard**

Photos 03



03 A



03 B



03 C

I am Nadia Thibout-d'Anesy. A noblewoman. I did a lot of stupid things when I was young. My parents threw me out. They don't want to see me anymore. I don't care.

I was homeless for twenty years. There was a whole group of us hanging around together. I was the boss. No-one objected. We begged around Saint-Germain. Everything was spent on drink. We slept at the Gare du Nord train station or in one of the shelters. They all close on the 15th of March.

We don't go away on holiday. We suffer as much in summer as in winter.

I went through several detox programmes because of the alcohol. The social worker sent me to « les petits frères ». Nicole Marin took care of me. I owe her everything. She got me sorted with welfare payments and the medical card. She found a hostel room for me. It's the first time that something belongs to me. It was hard at first. I was very anxious. I opened the windows. I missed the life on the street. I couldn't sleep in my bed. I slept on the floor.

Now, I always keep have my keys around my neck. I'm afraid of having them stolen. I don't drink anymore. I decorated the wall with photos of Lourdes. I watch the soap opera Les Feux de l'Amour on television. I go shopping at the ED discount minimarket.

I often go to visit my homeless friends. I give them a bit of encouragement. They have no willpower. They get their dole money, and by the 4th or the 6th it's all gone. They complain but it's their own fault. How did I get by? **Nadia Thibout-d'Anesy**

Photos 04



04 A



04 B



04 C

My name is Patrick. I'm 57. I never knew my father. My mother never spoke of him. She said he was someone of no importance, violent and alcoholic. I know where he lives. I never dared to go see him.

In 1978, I joined the army. I was sent to the parachute regiment. I went to Lebanon with the UN. We were a peace-keeping force. We were more like sitting ducks. Two friends died there. I still think of it at night. When I came back, I was no longer the same person. I was broken. I abandoned everything. I quickly ended up homeless. I stayed that way for seventeen years. Alcohol, drugs, I was into everything.

I don't want to talk about that period. It is too painful.

« Les petits frères des Pauvres » found me a room in a hostel. That put me back on my feet. At first it was hard. You have to face problems that you don't have when you're homeless. Manage a budget, renew your identity papers, gather together the documents for the social welfare and medical card applications.

I do some housework for a pensioner to earn a bit more money. I also help the manager of the hostel with any odd jobs. But there is still the loneliness.

Being homeless, society totally turned its back on me. I find it hard to communicate, I get the feeling that people are judging me. That makes me aggressive. I can't imagine a future. I'd like to love someone. Man or woman, whatever. Just someone to count on. **Patrick**

Photos 05



05 A



05 B



05 C

Do you want my first name? I'm Paulette. Do you want my surname? I tell you if give me a cigarette. My surname is Marseille. Like the city.

I don't have any family anymore. Don't care. My only family is my friends around Voltaire Square. In the morning, I gather up cigarette butts. I'm drunk in the evening. I like the outings with Suzanne from the « petits frères ». We go to the musée d'Orsay. It's full of statues. There's even guys totally naked. I live in a cupboard. I don't care. I feel at home there. A cupboard is better than being homeless. At least I've a roof and a bed.

I have no water. That doesn't bother me. I don't wash. I cook for myself. I beg for cigarettes and drink. I don't care for the rest. Suzanne tells me that I'm unhealthy because of the cockroaches. They're going to put me in a room in China Street. Apparently there are toilets, a shower, and even a television. I'll be like a queen. Paulette, Queen of China. **Paulette Marseille**



Photo 06 -

I met Cathy in the street thirteen years ago. We were both begging. Since then we've never left each other. She is physically handicapped. She's a bit crazy. I love her as she is. For the past two years we have been lodged by « les petits frères » at the Star hostel. It is everything that we wanted. To be together. To be independent. And especially not to be out on the streets. .

It is really tiring living on the street. It wore us down. The room is small. It is a bit scruffy but that's ok.

We live on the bed. We use it to sleep on and to eat off. We have a small television. We hardly go out any more. Cathy can't move.

I go begging once a week. That covers us for the week, including cigarettes and beer.

Marriage is our only aim. To leave a little mark that we had lived together. I hope that we'll make it physically. We're really knackered. **Xavier et Cathy**