

THE ONES MOST IN NEED ARE THE ONES LEFT BEHIND

by
Mary DeVeny

“Housing is not some commodity or luxury to be cynically exploited for maximum profit. It is a human necessity, necessary for the preservation of life and health. More than that, housing is a human right, according to the UN Declaration of Human Rights.”

Terry Messman

“A Prophetic Warning About Deadly Effects of Eviction”

Press Release sent by Mary Jesus to the newspapers in Oakland, California, October 27, 2004:

“This is a newsworthy story that the public would definitely be interested in. The building I live in, in downtown Oakland, was purchased five years ago. I had already been living here for seven years. I was the manager for a brief period of three years, then fired without just cause. They have harassed me consistently since then. Even attempting to evict me in July of 2003, then again in September of 2004. I am very poor, so had to represent myself. It seemed to me that this particular judge, a Superior Court Judge in the limited jurisdiction, has a tendency to decide against Pro Per Litigants. My case NEVER should have gone as far as it went, because the Oakland rental board had already stated that I did not owe the landlords any money. They sought to evict me anyway; the judge allowed their attorney to stifle my evidence. It was all totally illegal”



Dear Minister Dekker:

You do not know me nor will you ever have to opportunity to meet me. My name is Mary Jesus and I am dead. On December 10, 2004, I decided to end my life. I climbed to the top floor of the Tribune Tower building in Oakland, California and jumped. The day before, I was officially evicted from my home of 13 years. With no where else to go, I was left with two choices. Live on the street or die. I chose to die. I would like to share my story with you since you have the power to keep this from ever happening again.

In 1993, I moved into Dunsmuir Apartments in Oakland, California. The owners hired me on as resident manager. I kept the common areas clean, planted flowers and did what I could to add dignity to this fine old building. I was so happy to have a permanent address and a place I could feel safe. You see, for the better part of my childhood, we moved around from domestic violence shelters and motel rooms with my mother and siblings. When I was 10, I found my mother on the floor in a pool of blood and my father standing over her with a butcher knife. My mother survived and my father went to prison. Until I found this apartment, I was either in foster care, juvenile detention or on the streets.

In 1998, my building was sold and I lost my job as resident manager. But after informing the tenants that the new owners were violating the law by not keeping an on-site manager, I was re-hired and my rent was waived. But over the next few years, things became more difficult. The owners blamed me for any code violations. They wanted me to offer money to an elderly tenant to move out so the apartment could be rented at a higher rate. In July 2000, I ended up briefly in a psychiatric hospital because of all the pressure. Next May, the owners fired me but said I still could keep the apartment. I applied for Government assistance to cover a portion of the rent and worked as a phone sex operator to cover the rest of my expenses. I was continually harassed by the new managers. They wanted me out. But there was a law that prohibited owners from evicting without just cause. They encouraged residents to call the police on me; they refused to give me receipts for my rent payment and then would deny receiving it.

The harassment continued until July 2003 when the owners attempted to evict me. I convinced the courts that my landlords had grossly miscalculated what I owed in back rent. So I sued them for harassment but lost. Again in the end of 2003 and beginning of 2004, the landlords tried to increase my rent and I won again because I was not given proper notice. The hearing officer had reported that I was actually ahead in my rent so I started to pay less. It turned out to be a clerical error and by the time it was discovered, I was \$1018.77 behind. Even though this was an error, it provided the landlords with "just cause" to evict me. The eviction date was set for October 7. I managed to get 2 eviction stays. I was desperate but I knew I had the truth on my side. I sent a press release to the local newspapers. It read:

With each hearing, I became more scared and nervous. I was so close to having everything be OK. Although I had another hearing set for Dec 17 but on the 7th, I was notified that I had lost. I couldn't take it. I was taken to a psychiatric hospital in restraints but released later that day. I came home, put my things in plastic bags, started a fire in my apartment and tried to hang myself. Again I was taken to the hospital. The next day I was released to my friends Miriam and Vale. They were very kind. They said I could stay with them. The next morning they sent me out with a list of errands to help get my life back in order. But it was hopeless. I lost my home, the only place I could ever feel safe. So I went to the observation tower on the 7th floor of the Tribune Building. I stood on the ledge and watched the crowd gather below. Police and reporters tried to talk to me but I knew they really didn't care whether I would have been homeless or not. All they would

