

4/30/2018

My name is Michael Shelby Suberlak (née Edwards), and I am a former resident of Lisieux House. I was asked to give a statement as to my experience having been part of this community. I consider it a privilege to do so, just as it was a privilege to spend the three years leading up to my matrimonial vows in this special place of spiritual healing and preparation.

It is perhaps worth noting that I am what you might call a 'revert' to the Catholic faith. Disillusioned with what I perceived as hypocrisy in Catholics around me, and lured by the glamour of various subcultures in Seattle, I started to experiment with occultism and sexuality, and left the Church when I was eighteen, followed by a rapid descent into alcoholism, addiction, promiscuity, abortion, abusive relationships and despair. 'Hitting bottom' within a few short years, I began to climb out of the pit with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous and my 'Higher Power,' which I soon suspected might be the same Jesus Christ I had learned about in Catholic Schools growing up. It took years to untangle the knot of false beliefs and fears that prevented me from fully seeing the truth, but at 28 years old, I re-entered the Catholic Church. Overjoyed with the new hope I had been granted, I began the *real* healing journey of living a Sacramental Life, overcoming, bit by bit, the wounds, lies and sins of my former years.

One of the most challenging aspects of this new life for me was finding a community of faithful Catholics that were willing to do more than just say 'hi' in the vestibule after mass. I had been shattered, both emotionally and spiritually. I desperately needed real faith-sharing partners and spiritual friends. Another difficulty was that, as an artist, my income was very low, and finding a place to live in Seattle meant sacrificing my safety. I constantly found myself putting up with drug use, sexual impurity and intimidation wherever I could *afford* to rent. Living at home with family was not an option for me, because of physical abuse happening there. It seemed there was no safe place for me. One day I realized that I might never heal as I needed to if I continued to live in places and with people that weren't good for my soul. I left the very day I fully realized how spiritually harmful my current situation was--even though I had almost no money and no idea where I would go. I slept on couches and did house-sitting, praying every day for God's providence. Within a few months, at a Catholic bookstore, I ran into Alane Howard, a resident at the Lisieux House. She invited me to come and stay for a week of discernment, to see if I would be a good fit for the community at LH. I was ecstatic.

I wondered at first if I could be included, since I was discerning marriage; not a religious vocation. Alane explained that Lisieux house is a place for young women of *all* potential vocations to share their spiritual gifts and support one another on the journey. She was herself quite certain of her vocation to religious life, but for her own reasons, needed to wait on God before joining a specific community. (Ms. Howard is, as I write, now departing from Lisieux House to help *start* a religious community of consecrated sisters in Tallahassee, Florida, under guidance from their bishop. She was 'Maid of Honor' in my wedding.)

God answered my prayers by providing precisely the kind of loving, orderly, Christ-centered Catholic home I hoped could exist. When I first visited the halls of LH, the supernatural atmosphere of the place was palpable. It permeated every room. After a little less than three years at LH, I was prepared to enter Holy matrimony with a gentle, devoutly Catholic young man. We are now expecting our first child.

With the amount of wounds, trauma, and difficulties I had going into discerning my vocation to marriage and family life, it's hard to imagine how Krzys and I would have been able to stay the course and finally make it to the altar without the existence of the Lisieux House. We feel it was a gift of Providence. We spent many hours in prayer, fellowship, study, discussion and sharing in the house. We hosted a weekly Bible study together in the library, and Krzys was a regular guest and helper for community dinners, masses, and special gatherings with priests and religious sisters. We regularly ended our evenings in night prayer in the chapel with the rest of the community. As we grew, the high level of spiritual discussion and fellowship, atmosphere of prayer, and constant presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament at Lisieux House helped us to work through our challenges together in faith and in purity; to fully embrace the vocation to which God was calling us. The Lisieux House taught us through lived experience how we might form a *holy* household for ourselves and our children.

I am convinced that Lisieux House is a work of the Holy Spirit. My testimony is only one of many. I could tell stories of other young women whose lives were changed, decisively and for the better, who found their place in the greater Church because of their pivotal time at Lisieux House. I am grateful to Archbishop Peter Sartain for allowing me to find my own little 'niche' in Seattle when I needed it most; a place to heal and be formed in Christ, with the constant example of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, before taking on the breathtaking responsibility of the family vocation. I will thank God to see the Lisieux House continue to take root and blossom in the Archdiocese of Seattle, where it is a treasure to those whose lives have been changed, and will be changed by it in the future.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Michael Shelby Suberlak