

A New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, The Di Bella Family

Written by Karah Van Kammen



by Candy Thompson

The panoramic view creeping through the windows of the massive Greyhound bus, coupled with the excitement of a new construction job awaiting him in Colorado, kept Tom and his wife Marissa on the edge of their seat. The steady roar of the engine was just enough to lull their three-year old son, Lucas to sleep for much of the 22 hour trip.

The Di Bellas were thrilled at the prospect of a new life, job and home. They could already picture a brighter future. However, that picture had been embellished with unfulfilled promises.

The temporary living arrangements afforded them little space. The neighborhood bore no resemblance to the photos they had seen. The very worst part was when Tom discovered that his employer was experiencing difficulties in keeping his business going.

Within one month, Tom was told that the business was folding but that his employer's brother had the same business in Phoenix. Tom could return with his family and his bosses' brother would help to set him up. This could save them.

With no job and very little resources left, Tom, Marissa and Lucas climbed on-board the big Greyhound and headed back to Arizona. This time, their excitement was replaced with fear and anxiety. This had to work.

And then the unbelievable...they arrived without their luggage. There was no trace of it in the luggage compartments. Their disappointment was overwhelming. They didn't have money to replace their clothing and personal needs.

Tom and Marissa were wrought with concern as their taxi cab pulled up to an abandoned building. This couldn't be the right address. Tom double checked and yes, it was the one he was given. He hurriedly phoned his old employer in Colorado, to find the number had been disconnected. They were alone...abandoned. "How could this be happening?" they thought. Tom's anguish was crushing. Marissa's fears were overpowering.

They slept on the streets for two-weeks after that dreadful day three-months ago. They had only the clothes on their backs and the stroller for Lucas. Fortunately, Tom still had a working cell-phone. His thoughtful exploration brought them to A New Leaf's La Mesita Family Homeless Shelter where they found comfort and safety.

Since then, Tom has found and maintained gainful employment. This week, they will leave A New Leaf, excited once again to be moving into supportive housing and their own home. They wrote us this letter:

"I want to write you a letter of thank you, even though the words don't seem to have enough meaning in this case. Not only did you make us feel welcome, you made the feeling of being homeless go away.

Within a blink of an eye, you helped us with clothing, shoes for my job and you gave us an incredible apartment starter kit. This act of kindness isn't seen anymore. It's an old school thing. Modern day people are lost in phones, texting and selfies.

People like you have the qualities of helping without wondering what's in it for you. You helped me and my family and for that, I will always be grateful to you."

Sincerely,

The Di Bella Family

This letter may have been addressed to A New Leaf, but it was meant for all of you...our supporters who help make this happen. Together, we can do mighty things for families in need.

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Arizona Foothills Magazine and Azfoothills.com have partnered with the comprehensive, non-profit, and human service agency, [A New Leaf](#), for an incredibly special series; one that is very near and dear to our organization's heart. **"Telling Untold Stories"** will illustrate multi-dimentional and raw stories of real men, women, and families within our communities who have been dealt a tricky hand of cards. These stories are ones of despair - ones of defeat - and, ones of fear. However, these stories become ones of faith - ones of determination - and, ones of hope.

When someone is in an abusive relationship or homeless, they often find themselves struggling to find help, not aware of the community resources available to them. A New Leaf is one of those critical resources. The agency has been a beacon of hope, supporting women and men who experience domestic violence and homelessness.

The mission of A New Leaf is Helping Families . . . Changing Lives. A New Leaf inspires and supports individuals and families in their journey to lifelong independence. The agency operates Autumn House, a domestic violence facility in the East Valley, as well as Faith House, a domestic violence shelter and transitional housing resource in the West Valley as well as a number of homeless shelters for those in crisis.

Last year, A New Leaf served nearly 21,943 individuals with resources, from immediate shelter, transitional housing, basic needs, job assistance, counseling and after school programs. Victims of domestic violence are able to start a new life due to the care and support of A New Leaf's staff and volunteers. Founded in 1971, A New Leaf is dedicated to making lives better and fighting against domestic violence and homelessness in our state.

For more information about A New Leaf programs including tours and how you can help, please contact 480-464-4648 or visit us at www.TurnaNewLeaf.org.