

An Artist, Caretaker and Food Bank User

By Taryn Chock

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On a windy day in November, Kitt Caylor sits at her favorite bookstore, Anthology, sipping on a cup of coffee. She looks like any other 69-year-old woman. "I look normal, but things are not normal inside," Caylor said. In 2003, Caylor was diagnosed with West Nile Virus, a disease spread by mosquitoes, which led to meningitis. "(West Nile) is like the flu, but a thousand times worse," she said.

After three years of being ill, a wrist injury, a staph infection in her right arm and a fall that resulted in a hole in her heart, Caylor was left jobless and penniless. She turned to the Food Bank for Larimer County, www.foodbanklarimer.org. "I am just so grateful to the Food Bank. I really am," she said. "You just cannot imagine what it's like to be such a capable person ... and just being brought to your knees and not being able to get through the day." Caylor is one of approximately 1,000 people who use the Food Bank onsite pantry every day, according to Executive Director Amy Pezzani. As a natural born caretaker, Caylor was not initially comfortable with the idea of having to have someone help her out. "As far as my work history is concerned, I have always been someone who did things for other people," Caylor said. "I was a social worker, a teacher, a counselor, a designer, someone who served other people. I felt comfortable like that."

While Caylor may not have liked the idea of using the Food Bank, she admits that she needed help. Without being able to work, Caylor has been living off her Social Security check. "It's kind of fun to figure out how you can live on that ... there are ways you can ... believe it or not," she said with a smile. Money may not be abundant for Caylor, but she considers herself a wealthy person because of her knowledge and education. "When I had West Nile and I thought I wasn't going to wake up, it was my education and the people that have helped me all over the world. I felt like I was just the richest person in the world, and it was OK," she said.

Prior to coming to Colorado, Caylor attended Trinity University where she studied medicine, art and education. After going to graduate school at the University of Texas-Austin, she traveled to India, where she went to school and studied art and philosophy. She continued to travel back and forth between America and India for 25 years, trying to gain as much knowledge as she could. "It was like (my mind was) this little house with these four walls and everything I learned was like the windows would open, or the blinds would go up. But (India) just blew the roof off as far as knowledge and experience," Caylor said. One of the things she learned from these travels is the importance and necessity of food, which is not always easy to come by. "There's people eating out of the gutter (in India) ... it was a real eye-opening experience," Caylor said. "Fresh water, fresh food is just not that easy to find." That is why Caylor is so thankful to the Food Bank for Larimer County.

"I was in such need by the time I went and there were all the stacks being offered of bread ... I stood on the floor and cried out of gratitude and wonder, so I'll do anything for the Food Bank," she said. In addition to getting food, Caylor received a kindness that she never expected. "They're all so nice and they're all so loving and interested and sincere ... I have just never been a part of anything like that," Caylor said. "The Food Bank is the closest thing to a family I know."

Taryn Chock is a Colorado State University student who wrote this story on behalf of the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund.