

## Jobless and homeless, blogger scores Elle job

August 31 2009, By LEANNE ITALIE , Associated Press Writer

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This photo taken Aug. 28, 2009 shows Brianna Karp, right, and her boyfriend, Matt Barnes, both bloggers, posing with their dog at an RV that they are living in Riverside.(AP Photo/Francis Specker)

(AP) -- Six months ago, Brianna Karp found herself living in an old truck and camper she inherited after the suicide of a father she barely knew.

On Monday, her life became a 21st century fairytale when she turned her blog about homelessness into a plum internship for the fashion bible Elle magazine.

This is a story about love and [Twitter](#), hope and the relative safety of a Walmart parking lot. Bri is our star, but there's also Matt, her trans-

Atlantic boyfriend who found her on the streets of Orange County, Calif., as she wrote about her predicament at [girlsguidetohomelessness.com](http://girlsguidetohomelessness.com).

And there's E. Jean Carroll, a popular advice columnist for Elle who reached out with a \$150-a-month job after Bri touched her in a letter, signing off Homeless, But Not Hopeless.

But to Bri and Matt, it's also a story about thousands of other smart, skilled, can-do people who recently had work and real addresses but don't any more.

"So inaccurate is the public perception of homelessness that the world cries foul when a homeless person is seen with a mobile phone or an iPod or heaven forbid, a laptop," Matt said. "Homeless people don't use the Internet, they don't write blogs, they're not webmasters and they don't use Twitter. They are alcoholics, they are substance abusers, they are illiterate. They don't work. They sure as hell don't have the right to fall in love. Do they?"

Matthew Barnes, 36, and Brianna Karp, 24, are none of those bad things, some of those good things and did just that.

Karp left her emotionally unstable mother at age 18, later landing as an executive assistant at Kelley Blue Book's headquarters in Irvine, Calif. When she was laid off in July 2008, she lived on temp work and [unemployment](#) benefits until she couldn't afford to keep her \$1,500-a-month, 600-square-foot cottage in Costa Mesa.

"I had a few hundred dollars left," Karp said. "I had been working a very decent job earning about \$50,000 a year. But I couldn't keep relying on finding a new job. I moved in with my mother and her husband for a month or two, but it didn't work out. It was tense."

On Feb. 26, she took advantage of a Walmart policy allowing owners of recreational vehicles to use some of their store parking lots for overnight stays, heading for one in Brea with her Mastiff, Fezzik. And she blogged from Starbucks while she continued to search for work, buying \$5 cards each month that entitled her to sip coffee and soak up unlimited Wi-Fi.

"I was unassuming and well dressed and I didn't bother anyone," she said. "It's a great resource when you're homeless. It's invaluable. They were always happy to see me."

She rolled out her resume at the rate of 30 or 40 each day, picking up a little more temp work, living at Walmart in the 30-foot camper with no heat, running water or means to cook. She wrote as a way to stay in touch with the world. Soon, other homeless people were leaving comments on her blog, telling their stories and cheering her on.

"I was definitely surprised just how many homeless and former homeless people are online and using social media to seek opportunities," Karp said.

One of them was Barnes, a Brit who was living in Huntly, Scotland, and became homeless after his marriage fell apart and he lost his job. He, too, was running a blog - [homelesstales.com](http://homelesstales.com).

In March, Barnes found Karp on Twitter promoting her writing: "Tips for surviving homelessness. You may be homeless, but you do not need to be a bum!" she tweeted. He was her first follower. She, he said, "seemed courageous and levelheaded but also a little frightened and certainly vulnerable. She was also adorably cute with the prettiest eyes, though it was to be a while before I expressed this opinion to her."

They exchanged direct messages on Twitter, then e-mail, then instant messages. Eventually Barnes made his way to California and they shared

the camper, she chasing work and he maintaining his blog.

But they had forgotten about something in the chaos of the day-to-day after Walmart kicked them off the property and they relocated to the backyard of a friend of a friend in Riverside, Calif.

Back in early April, Karp had run across a casting call for a reality show that was to feature executive assistants. She auditioned but froze due to nerves and felt she had missed the chance. A couple of days after the disaster, she e-mailed E. Jean as a lark, laying out her life and asking, "How does one get another shot when one screws up a job interview?"

Carroll put the letter and her response on [askejean.com](http://askejean.com) and in the August Elle, telling her e-mailer, "Miss Homeless, my dear: You don't `get' another shot. You take it."

She offered Karp a telecommuting internship of four months, explaining, "You knocked me out with your courage and spirit," and concluded: "At the end of the four months, if you don't have a job and an awesome place to live, I will become YOUR intern."

The offer went unanswered until Aug. 24, when Karp stumbled across a story about it on another Web site. Karp was frantic that she had once again missed out on a life-transforming opportunity, sure the magazine and the columnist had given up on hearing from her. She quickly e-mailed E. Jean her enthusiastic yes and found the offer was still good.

"I'm so stoked. I don't care if she wants me to pick up her dog's poop," Karp said. "I've read her column for years."

The internship amounts to an hour a day, six days a week so Karp can continue to search for work. Carroll hopes to use Karp to help answer e-mail from readers and sort the results of a survey about college students

she conducted on Facebook.

Karp has also been invited to blog about her life and her future at elle.com for an undisclosed sum. Her first entry went up Monday with the headline: The New Face of Homelessness.

"You hear stories which break your heart, smash your heart up that you've got to see what you can do," Carroll said. "This is certainly one tiny little thing, but I think her voice is a very important one, and it's not heard. We're going to try to get her on her feet."

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On the Net:

[girlsguidetohomelessness.com](http://girlsguidetohomelessness.com)

[homelesstales.com](http://homelesstales.com)

[fashion.elle.com/blog/2009/08/ ... of-homelessness.html](http://fashion.elle.com/blog/2009/08/...of-homelessness.html)

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