

Seeing the Invisible

✖ When **USA Today** advertising executive Laura Schroff first met 11-year-old panhandler Maurice Mazyck on the streets of New York City, he was hungry and in need of a friend. Compelled to help, Schroff, who was 35, took him to a nearby McDonald's for lunch. That day began years of Monday-night dinners and a 25-year friendship.

As their unique friendship continued, Schroff quickly learned that Mazyck's life was in turmoil. Not only was he not getting enough to eat, his mother was addicted to drugs and he was constantly getting into fights—when he'd occasionally attend school.

His living situation wasn't any better. He bounced in and out of homeless shelters, foster homes and one-bedroom apartments inhabited by 20 other people.

Though Mazyck didn't live with Schroff, she became a surrogate parent. In addition to their weekly dinners, she would visit his school to stay abreast of his progress. Schroff would also have him over for Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays filled with multicourse meals and gifts. And she'd expose him to numerous places and events that he had only seen on television.

Decades later this young man, whose future once looked bleak, is now married with a family and has started a ministry to help other young kids in the predicament he was once in.

His and Schroff's relationship is still strong. "People early on used to say to me, 'Maurice is so lucky,'" Schroff says. "I used to say: 'You don't understand. He brings so much into my life.' ... We were fated to meet."

In her new book, *An Invisible Thread*, Schroff says she hopes to help change how people perceive the homeless. She also

wants readers to slow down and not take life and people for granted.

“Despite the hardships that we face, we have all these wonderful, amazing miracles that come into our lives. We have to learn to see them and appreciate them,” she says.