

WILLIAM'S STORY

in his own words



WHERE THE STORY BEGAN

My name is William Tindale. I'm 57 years old. I've lived on the streets since I was age 14. Back when I was 14 years of age, my parents put me out on the streets because I would neither go to school nor go to work. So my parents found it fit to kick me out. When they kicked me out, I had to fend for myself on the streets. By fending for myself, what I mean is basically I had to live from day to day by selling myself. I ended up living with a male – gay fella. For me to stay there, I had to perform sexual acts for him. It basically meant that I was able to eat there and sleep somewhere that was "safe."

When I decided not to be doing that anymore, I was 16 years of age. I found my first job. I ended up sleeping at a warehouse. It was not the greatest conditions, but it was a paying job – till I got fired for stealing. I was stealing food basically to keep myself from being hungry so I'd be able to work. In doing so, they let me go. I lived on the streets for 5 and a half years after that. I was living from shelter to shelter, from a garbage can to a back alley, and then in a stairwell.

Then I met up with a female. She was a drug addict. I got hooked on heroin and cocaine, which is not the best thing to be hooked on.

But when you've living on the streets, what can you do?

You drown your sorrows in drugs, and I so did.

Well by me doing that, I put myself in a much worse situation than I thought I would be in.

I was subject to being raped, which I was.

I was hospitalized.

I was stabbed 3 times and shot once.

I was hung.

By the luck of God, I was found by a lady in the alley. I was hanged. They hung me upside down by my feet. I lost consciousness. I woke up in St. Mike's hospital, wondering where the hell I was.

Coming off of cocaine is not an easy thing to be doing when you're in a hospital. I ended up getting arrested because I had drug paraphernalia on me. The nurses had found it. I ended up doing a little time in jail. I figured "Okay, I'm safe." Well you're not safe there either, believe it or not.

You fend for yourself in jail too, which is the same as the outside world.

But back to when I was on the streets. When I was on the streets, it was a much tougher go. I stayed at Covenant House in Toronto. Then I stayed at a men's shelter called the Seaton House. Then I stayed at the Salvation Army for men. By staying at all these shelters, I ended up catching diseases. I caught head lice. I caught scabies. Some things you can't get rid of on the streets because there's no help. The only help you have is if you walk into a shelter, they can offer you a pair of socks or a shower. I had to wait for meals. Whenever I could scrounge, I would find. I would go to a garbage can and look for a piece of bread or a chunk of hamburger. And I would eat it – raw or cooked. I became very ill living on the streets. I ended up being hospitalized for a month. I was malnutrition-ed. I was dehydrated. This was in the middle of winter and I had nowhere to go. So I ended up staying at a place called Allen Gardens. I ended up living on a picnic bench for a week. I covered up myself with newspaper and garbage bags. Sad as it may be, sad as it sounds.

*"Sad as it may be,
sad as it sounds."*

At age 21, I ended up sleeping in an abandoned car, not realizing that somebody had owned it. But it was abandoned. There were no license plates on it. The tires were off. So I figured, "Okay, a great place to hide." It was a nice place to stay warm under the snow and out of the cold. I fell asleep. It was a Friday night. I can remember it till the day I die. It was a Friday night when I fell asleep and I woke up in a wrecking yard in a crusher. I was inches away from dying. If I hadn't had hollered loud enough, the man in the machine wouldn't have heard me. He would have crushed me to death. That's what drugs will do to you. It will put you right out. You don't feel nothing and you don't see nothing until it's almost too late.

I've been near death three times. I've overdosed. I've had my fingers crushed by a crusher in the scrapyard. And I've tried to commit suicide because **I didn't figure that I had anybody that cared.**

My mother was a drunk and my father worked all day. My father could only deal with so much. He couldn't deal with my shit, nor could he deal with my mother's. So he threw me out the damn door. My father was a very, very strict man. He believed in two things: You work for what you get and if you don't work, you starve. My family turned around and told me I'd end up to be a nothing. **A nobody. I was a nobody for many years.** I turned to a lot of things that I didn't want to do – robbing people, stealing from people, stealing from family, stealing from my sisters. Nobody trusted me.

But my parents let me back in their house for 2 weeks. They felt that I deserved to be on the streets. What they didn't realize was what I went through. I didn't tell them I got raped. I didn't tell them I had to perform sexual acts to stay alive. I stole? Of course – I had to survive. I used to steal clothing off of clothes lines. Or somebody would let me shovel their walk way and would let me in their house to drink a bit of milk or something to eat. I would look around and see what I could take because **it was the only way I could survive.**

*"It was the only way
I could survive."*

When I turned 25 years of age, that's when I smartened up. I got married. I had 2 children. And in that time frame of having children, we ended up bouncing from family shelter to family shelter. The government wasn't giving us enough. There was no adequate housing. To subsidize a family, you need double income. Well you can't have that if you have children below school age because they have to be tended to. So in that process, myself and my spouse at the time, ended up having bad hygiene.

Our social worker that we had for Ontario Work – we had to bring our children into each meeting we had to go to. And they found out that our hygiene wasn't the best so they called the Children's Aid on us. They took our children away from us. So in that process, she [wife] decided she was going to part her way with me. So I was left back out on the streets again. She went to her parents. I was back out on the streets.

I begged and pleaded with my parents to let me back in.
They turned around and said 'No. You deserve what you get.'

THE DEATHS

When I talked to you last Monday, I told you I would give you the stats on how many people would die. Nine street people have died. Nine. Overdose and they froze. This is as of last Monday. It's sad. Very sad.

Out of those people that passed away, there was a 19 year old boy. He froze to death - right here in downtown Kitchener, which is very sad. It's a very young age.

How do you think they're going to bury him? They're not.

He's a number to the system. He's not a name, like you and I have. He's a number. You're coat tagged. You're numbered 'A,B,C' or "1,2,3." You're buried in a plot with no name - just a number.

There's kids on those streets right now. I can tell you how old they are. They are 12 and 13 years old. I've talked to a few of them to say "Hey listen." And I've told them my story.

I said, "Listen. Get yourself off of the streets as fast as you can. Find somewhere or somebody to help you because if you don't, you'll end up like me or you'll end up dead."

THE STREETS

I don't see how the government, the city, or the mayor is letting this happen.

They want to shove the homeless off the streets because they figure we're a burden to the system. We're human. To them? We're a number. We're a statistic.

And they have to stop treating us like we're a statistic. We have feelings. Yes, we're capable of working. There are some of us that are homeless that are working. They are living day by day - going to work in the morning and getting up from their tent or underneath a bus shelter or wherever it may be.

I don't know what the statistics are of people dying, but I can guarantee you before the end of this winter that whoever you see here, you may not see at the beginning of the new year. They are either going to freeze to death or they're going to die of an overdose. Why?

Because nobody is looking at us and saying "How can we help you?" and "What do you need?" and "How can we support you?"

There's only a few avenues that we can turn to, but when we are left with a wall in front of us, what do we do? What can we do? There's only certain things we can do. We can turn to crime to get a place to put over our head because they'll lock you up. Or we sneak into somebody's house - like a building - and sleep in a stairwell. Or we sleep in restaurants or a building that has warmth so that you're not going to freeze.

I would like to see these people that are sitting in office - our mayor for starters - spend a night or two on the streets. Eat what we eat out of a garbage can. See how it feels. Because it don't feel good. It don't feel good at all when you're sitting there eating raw meat because you can't afford to go out and enjoy a good meal.

THE SYSTEM

The system sucks. It's look at us like we're the burden. **We're not the burden.**

The system is the problem, because the numbers are not right. They're thinking about how to shove all of us out of the street.

They're pushing tents down with front-end loaders and they're shoving people away. In doing so, what does that create? That creates anger amongst us. That creates another problem because the city has to flip the bill for the cleaning. So why flip a bill for \$3000 or \$4000 when they could turn around and take a big chunk of land – which they do have in Kitchener – and start building low-income housing? Because it's a cost they don't WANT to give out.

Now as to being homeless, they don't care. All they're caring about is that they have a job to go to tomorrow morning and a family that they need to feed – and that's fine. We all need to eat. But we also need a roof. We need to be able to get our self-esteem back, our courage back, and our motivation back. If we can't have that, then what do we have?

We have drug addicts running around. We have prostitution. We have theft. Crimes are going to go up. And then what? You're going to lock us up? The jails are full. Why? Because when there's no housing, there's crime. There's not more that anybody else can do.

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There's not more that anybody else can do.

I went to a hotel here in Kitchener. There's 9 families in there. They have a problem. It's not just housing. They now have Children's Aid on their back because they don't have housing. They are trying to raise their little ones in a motel room. They're all bunched together.

Who's fault is that? Sure as hell ain't ours.

We try to rent. The people who are renting to us are raising their rent.

Even people in low income housing are struggling. I see it. I hear it. Across the street from here is low-income housing. I know two people there who come here [local community centre] because they can't make it. And their rent is even cheaper than what we're paying.

THE SYSTEM

An average person makes an average wage of let's say... \$20 an hour OR minimum wage of \$15 an hour.

You times that by 40 hours a week.

Then you got your tax deductions.

You're probably looking at making about \$400 or \$500 a week.

That's \$2000 a month.

That's not even enough to live on because your cost of living has gone up quite considerably.

The cost of groceries are going up. They're already up.

Somewhere along the line, the government has got to wake up and see what's happening because if they don't, a lot of us are going to die. And it's not by our own hands, it's by the governments hands. There's going to be a lot of unmarked graves. **This is where this person lies. How did he die? He froze to death. Why? Because the government didn't care.** They don't want to hear it. Why? Because we are a "problem." We're either a drug issue, a mental health issue, or just a "Joe" that can't get anywhere and that doesn't have the training to get a job.

Why? Maybe he came from a broken family. Maybe he came from an abusive family. Nobody knows because nobody cares to ask.

*NOBODY KNOWS
BECAUSE NOBODY CARES TO ASK.*

Some people choose to be on the streets.

Some people DON'T choose to be on the streets.

I'd say out of this whole area here, I'd say maybe 3% chose to be on the streets and the rest don't. They don't wish to be on the street. There's a few people here I know very well who don't choose to be on the streets but the system has put them there.

It's not that they don't want to work. It's not that they can't work. It's not that they can't afford an apartment. It's just there is no rent control. They took that away. The landlord can charge what they figure is market place.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The system is letting us down. There's nobody out there to say "Hey, this stops." Ford is doing nothing. Trudeau is doing nothing. Our mayor, our deputy mayor, and even our councillors are doing nothing. They're not worrying about it. What they're worried about is covid, but they're not seeing the statistics of the homeless coming out of covid. See, that's what's hidden here. Covid itself is pushing the homeless out. There's more of us out here now. I don't know if you're seeing it, but I'm sure seeing it because I'm sitting at the other end of the table now.

I'm seeing a lot of homeless now since covid hit.

THE STIGMA OF ADDICTION

I'm a recovering addict. I go to Toronto every Monday. I see a lot between here and Toronto. I'm on what they call "suboxone." What does it do? It stops me from getting the urge to take cocaine or a pill like Percocet, morphine, or whichever.

Whatever street drug there is, I've done it all. I've done cocaine, heroin, speed, meth, Percocet. You name it. Been there, done that. I figured that a high would keep the pain away. And that's how it is with a lot of street people.

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And that's how it is with a lot of street people.

People misunderstand quite a bit about street people.

If you sit back and you read into them... if you listen to them, they're hurting. And it's not for attention. It's because the system abandoned them. And that's how it is. The system is abandoning us. They are abandoning families, single women, and single men.

The government is picking and choosing. The city of Kitchener isn't going to do anything for us. If anything, they want us out of here. They want to see vacancies so that we're not a burden on them and so they don't have to worry about us. They want to shove us off to another county.

WILLIAM'S CURRENT SITUATION

Today, as I speak with you, we have to vacate our apartment on January 28.

We've been given 60 days to find accommodations for myself [I'm 57 years old], for my wife [She's 52 years old], my 20 year old son that has disabilities, and my 12 year old boy that has disabilities.

Where do I accommodate them at a reasonable rent? You can't. The government is not letting us live with a better budget.

The city of Kitchener is not looking at the homeless. They're looking to see if they can build skyscrapers. We can't live with skyscrapers. We can't live with condos. 6% of the people in Kitchener today, as I speak with you, are unemployed and homeless.

And **it's getting worse day by day.**

When me, my wife, and my 2 children were homeless, they bounced us from Peel region to the other end of Scarborough into a motel. It was a cockroach infested motel with hookers. Hookers were using the rooms and bringing in their "John's." My kids had to see this. That's not fair to my kids. My kids don't need to be seeing all of this. But they do. Why is that? Because that is the only left opportunity that we have. If it wasn't for here, we'd have nothing.

I don't know where I'm going to be on January 28. I got no clue. The shelters here are packed. They're full. They're at capacity. Now from what I'm hearing, they're putting people in hotels. **Well, is that a way to solve a problem? No. It's not a way to solve a problem.**

They want to decrease the welfare now. If they decrease it, you're going to have more homelessness. You're going to have more of us on the streets and I don't see why they want to do that.

Whether it be the provincial or federal government doing this, someone needs to wake up and see what's happening. If they don't see what's happening, it's going to be a sad state. You're going to see families perish on the streets,

"You're going to see families perish on the streets."



SURVIVAL

People are scared to die. I'm 57 years old and **I'm damn scared of dying**. I'm terrified. And so are a lot of other people in this world. But **you got to do what you have to do** – whether it be performing sexual acts, stealing, robbing, living out of a garbage dumpster, or lying to get food.

If you ever had a hard look one day, look behind the shopping malls and just watch the dumpster. You'll see them. They are going around in their shopping carts and you'll see them crawl in. They'll scrounge through the garbage to see if they can find anything "semi-okay" to eat or find cardboard to keep warm and dry.

It's happening. It's happening everywhere.

It's happening in your backyard. It's happening in my backyard.

And **people are turning a blind eye towards it. It needs to stop.**

I don't know what we can do to stop it, but something has to change.

Maybe who knows...maybe by me talking to you, I'll open up somebody's eyes... which I hope it does.

WILLIAM'S FAMILY

My kids are what keep me going. I haven't eaten in a couple of days because I don't care. I just need to feed my kids. **William breaks down crying**

My kids deserve to have a right to live. It hurts them. They see what I go through. They're not stupid kids.

This system is letting all of us down - each and every one of us. But who hurts the most? It's these young kids. They fall through the cracks. We as parents try to do the best we can for them. But who wants to put their kids into Children's Aid? I don't. So that's why I make sure they have what they have.

I don't know where I'm going to be in January, but I hope to find something. If I do, I will be gracious. I will be happy. But as it stands right now, I'm pushing what I can for my 2 kids. If it wasn't for my 2 kids, I wouldn't be sitting here. Me and my wife would be destitute somewhere, which is sad.

I hope that on January 28, I have a place to live, especially for my 2 boys and my wife.

I've been with my wife for 21 years. We've been through thick and thin. But I'll tell you something, out of all of this at least I know I have someone standing behind me which is my wife. I'm a lucky person, a VERY lucky person to have her. And I know she's lucky to have me. We try to work together. Sometimes we knock heads, but we do it.

