

June 2022

# LOUISE'S STORY

*in her own words*



# WHERE IT STARTED

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My name is Louise and I'm 67 years old. I worked at the Waterloo Inn, which was a very prestigious hotel here in Waterloo. I worked there for 24 years. I always worked. But then I got laid off after 24 years. I was married at the time and my husband of 20 years had a girlfriend for 10 of those years. I would come home from work and hear him saying to her, "I love you" and "We will work this out." He stood right there in front of me and told her that we were divorced. I looked at him and said "What divorce?" I did not sign anything. He would talk like I wasn't even there.

So after 20 years of that and losing my job, I guess I became depressed. Even though I had nowhere to go, I decided to up and leave. So I left him because I couldn't take it anymore. I lived in my car. I had a little Sunfire, which is a "sports kind of car" with two doors. It was very uncomfortable to sleep in that. But I refused to go to the shelters because I had heard so many bad things about them. So I stayed in my car with my clothes and stuff.

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I was still volunteering at the Kitchen Cupboard, which was a church-run program. I went every Monday and I would help hand out food to everybody. For that, I got a couple of extra food products of my own. There was a man there that volunteered. We'll call him "Tom." One day, I heard a lady saying to him, "You and your wife are always here helping." He said, "My wife? That's not my wife. I wish it was though." After hearing that, I decided to ask him if he wanted to go for coffee. So we went for coffee and we got together.

He collected bottles along the roadside. I told him I would have to give up my car because I can't afford it anymore. So I went collecting bottles with him. At the end of the night, we'd split whatever we got between the car, him, and myself. He helped me pay for the insurance and the gas. But he was only on Ontario Works [OW] and OW only paid \$725 at that time. He lived in a rooming house. He couldn't help me too much because he was a drinker and he needed money for drinks, smokes, and food.

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I forgot to mention my first husband was a womanizer. He was an abuser. He was an alcoholic and he smoked. "Tom" was also a severe alcoholic, smoker, and abuser. I also always thought he had a mental issue because he lied a lot. He would completely believe the lies himself. So it was hard to get along with him because I never knew what was a lie and was the truth. Even my son's father (who was before my husband) was also an alcoholic, an abuser, and a womanizer. It seems that I was in a habit of picking these men. So now I don't want to have anybody. All the men that come my way seem to be the same. So I didn't want to go down that same path anymore. They say that you tend to back to what you know. I don't want that.

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Eventually, I moved in with a relative. They started getting me to watch their children – which I did because I loved children. I watched the children all the time. The man was an alcoholic and an abuser. He smoked and he did drugs. So I would babysit for them and then go collect cans in the evening. One day, I was going to drive the woman's SUV and I had the children in the car. At one point, I had gotten out of the car because my wallet had fallen out the ground. So I got out of the car to get it and then one of the children jumped out of his car seat and into the front. I think he was 2 or 3 years old. I looked up and he was right at the gear shift and he put the gear shift into reverse. The SUV ran over my legs and then it stopped right on the driveway. All the kids got out because I was yelling – it was hurting. So the kids all jumped out and I made them all come around by me in case the vehicle moved again. I was screaming and the neighborhood came and helped me. One lady came, got in the car, and rolled the car forward so that my legs and hand could get out of the front wheel of the driver's side. Somebody called the police. They took me to the hospital. Nothing was broken, amazingly.

After that, the lady I was living with called me and said, "Come here tonight so that everything is okay." So in the morning, I went over. She went upstairs with the man and left the children running around downstairs with me while I was handicapped. I couldn't walk and the children were asking for things that I could not get. So I kept sending them upstairs and she was getting ticked off about that. The next morning, she said something about the kids coming up to bother her all the time while I'm here. I explained to her that I can't move because her kids ran me over. So she said, "Well you can just get out." I said, "Fine." I went under the sink to grab some reusable plastic bags that I bought. She came and slammed the cupboard door on my hand. She said, "What are you doing in my cupboard?" I said, "These are actually mine." Then she kicked me. So I grabbed what I could and left.

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I stayed in my car after that. I wasn't with "Tom" anymore because he was an abuser and an alcoholic. But I still collected cans with him. He was also living out on the streets now. Sometimes we would get \$40 a day. Sometimes we would get \$60 a day. His money went to alcohol and mine went to my vehicle. So I still didn't end up making a whole lot of money. He eventually moved away and I still collected cans for a little while.

Eventually, I was told to call a women's shelter and I called them. They got me in and within 3 months, they helped me find an apartment that was geared-to-income. That's where I am right now. I'm in an apartment that is geared-to-income and it is a godsend. I really do believe God sent me down that path because I was too stubborn to go to any place like that to get help. So I think he really sent me down that path so I had no choice but to contact the shelter. Through all of that, I got into my apartment.

# WHERE IS SHE NOW?

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I've been with the ALIVE group for over 10 years, and then I started getting involved here [Social Development Centre]. I used to make soup and bring it in for our group. There would be lots of soup left over so I would put them in bowls and leave them for other groups. It always got eaten. I like to do that kind of thing.

In the summer, even when I was down and out, I would still come downtown. I would see all the guys walking around. I would go to Shoppers Drug Mart and buy bananas, apples, oranges, and water. I would take it around with me and hand it out to whoever asked for it. Anyone could have it. When they go to the soup kitchens, they rarely ever get fruit. That's why I chose to give out fruit.

When I found out about the Unsheltered Campaigns, I stated to help in giving out meals. Now, I'm living in a seniors building. So when I make my own personal stew or spaghetti, I take out what I want for today and tomorrow. Whatever is left over, I put them in containers – like margarine containers or whatever – and I take it up into the building. There are usually about 4 people that I give to. Sometimes when I have extra money, I buy extra bread and make sandwiches and take them through the building. I like to do that. I just love to help people. Sometimes I give out clothes to someone who needs them and I think to myself, "Why did I do that? I need that. I still use that." But you know what? I don't worry about these types of things. I have plenty.

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*Today, Louise is housed and continues to volunteer with different community organizations. She loves to help her community. She has 1 son, 5 grandchildren, and 1 great granddaughter.*

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