

# TRACY'S STORY

May 2023



I have been homeless since the fall of 2021. Before I became homeless, I was working 6 days a week in landscaping. I was living in a really nice house in Niagara with my partner, Colin, and my two younger children. We were doing really well and we were happy.



# The Home Invasion

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At the beginning of 2021, I was working with my boss in landscaping in Niagara. I was making really good money. He gave me a contract for one year and told me I would make \$100,000 in that year. It was all going great until 6 months in, my boss tried to sleep with me. I told him “No.” “I’m with Colin.” He got angry and he fired me. But eventually, he let me work again. He would fire me and then hire me. When he tried to sleep with me again and I refused, he would fire me again. Sometimes, he would let me work for 6 days, but he would only pay me for 3 days. This went on for a while and I was losing money. Eventually, we fell back on rent for 3-4 months. We got an eviction notice. We went to the Landlord and Tenant Board. We were told that if we pay our landlord \$4000, we would be allowed to stay. So Colin and I saved up \$3800 and we put it in a safe. But 2 weeks before the payment deadline, we had a home invasion.

I have always taught my children to help other people. I would make sandwiches with my son and we would give them to homeless people. When my kids asked me why we were doing that, I told them, “They are people, just like us.” One day, I had allowed a man and a woman – a couple – to come into my house to eat, cook and get washed up. They were living rough and I wanted to help them out. They were in my house and I think they saw where our safe was.

Days later, I woke up in the middle of the night to my daughter saying “Mom, wake up. There’s people in the house.” We woke up and found 5 men in our house. I recognized one of the men. He was the man we had allowed into our house. We called the police and the police caught them. But it was too late. Our rent money in the safe was gone, along with many of our other things.

Four days later, the police came to me and told me that the man I recognized had gone to the hospital with a pain in his side and he had died there. The other 2 men eventually died of an overdose. And the other 2 men ended up in prison.

# After The Eviction

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So we were evicted because we didn't have the rent money to pay our landlord anymore. The Sheriff came one day earlier than what was stated on the notice we received. We were given 12 hours by our landlord to pack our things and move out. We didn't even get the full 72 hours. Colin and I gathered up what we could and packed it on the sidewalk. I sent my 2 kids to my brothers' houses.

Colin and I tried to stay anywhere we could, but no one would take us in. I stayed in different shelters, but it was hard to get a bed. In some shelters, I was the only woman. The men circle you and harass you when you are the only woman. I felt unsafe. So I went to other shelters where there were women, but there was so much fighting and robbing. And I never knew if I had a bed that night. I lived in "the bushes" too, but I was so scared there.

So I stayed at my boss's house for a while because he was the only one that would take me in. While I was living there, he let me work. So I was trying to work to earn some money. He would try to sleep with me, but I always refused. Then one day, he raped me. He crossed the line and that was it. I packed up my stuff and I left. I went to look for Colin.

Colin had told me he would be going back to [the Waterloo Region] to find his mom. So I came to the Waterloo Region to look for him. I went to his mom's house, but she didn't let him stay with her. So I was out looking for him for 3 weeks. We didn't have phones. So I went to different shelters and soup kitchens to look for him. I would ask everyone if they have seen a man with a dog. After 3 weeks, I finally found him getting dinner at [a local soup kitchen]. We had both been looking for each other and I was so happy to finally see him. He told me that he had set up a tent at the park. So I have been here with him ever since.

Colin is a great support system for me. I know he's got my back and I have his. That's so important when you're living out here.

# The Healing

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I never thought my family would do this to me. No one will take me in. One of my brothers has my daughter. My other brother has my son. My dad lives far away and he has always given me unconditional love. But he got remarried and I think his wife has a strong influence on him because he won't take me in either.

I believe everything happens for a reason. I'm out here for a reason. I have had to do a lot of healing since I've been "tenting." You are forced to sit here with your thoughts and everything you have ever been through. I have had to come to terms with a lot of things that have happened in my life. I was never able to tell my story before. I could not talk about it without breaking down. But I can finally tell my story now and I feel like I have come a long way. I think we will be out of this soon. I see a light at the end of the tunnel.



# The Park

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The city wants us out of the park, but I have felt safe here. I still suffer from a lot of PTSD. The slightest noise or movement makes me jump out of my skin. It makes me shake. I have roughed it out in “the bushes” before and I was terrified. If it was dark, I wouldn’t go into “the bushes” to go into my tent. If it was dark and I was already in my tent, I wouldn’t leave my tent. The park feels safe to me because the park is where you go to as a kid, you know? You go to the park with your parents to play and you feel safe. It feels like a familiar place here.

After the city put up the fences around the park, we were told that there would be a protest on Thursday and that the fences were up to keep us safe. We were told that the protestors may harm us and that the fences were for our protection. We didn’t know what was happening. But when the protest happened, we found out that the protesters are on our side. The protestors had come to support those of us living here at the park. I think the city put up the fences to scare us and to force us to get out of here.

We have been offered the cabins at the new outdoor shelter. But we have no idea what it looks like or what it will be like there. Before the protest, we were offered one night at the motel to “keep us safe.” Colin and I were told we could have a tour of the cabins the next day. At first, we agreed to this. But then we were told that all of our stuff would be packed up and transferred to the cabins once we go to the motel. So we said we need some time to think about it.

Once we leave this park, we won’t be allowed back in. But we have no idea what the cabins are like so we are not sure what to do. We just don’t trust the city or what they tell us anymore. So we have to think about it. The cabins are only for one person so Colin and I would have to sleep separately. The main reason I would want to go to the cabins is so that my kids can visit me. But we also just don’t feel safe at the park anymore ever since they put the fences up. People walk by everyday yelling at us. “Get a f----- job!” “We are going to burn the whole island down!” We are scared to even go to sleep now. If you don’t find us at the park anymore, we will probably end up at the cabins because it doesn’t seem like we have a choice.