

John's Story

My name is **John Frederick Kirk**. My age is 66; my birthplace was Barrie Ontario Canada, in the year 1950. I grew up in the town of Barrie.

I am a person who likes to be comfortable and I do like to feel safe in any environment where I reside. I was born to two very caring parents. I was enrolled in a public school that I attended until grade seven, from there I was moved on to high school. I attended grades nine and ten occupational courses where I was taught woodworking, boat construction, small engines, carburation, shipping and receiving. After that, I worked for a couple of hardware stores and a few different factories.

At the age of seventeen, I joined the Canadian Armed Forces Army Reserve. In the army reserve while training at Camp Borden, I picked up the habit of drinking beer because it was available in our barracks for a nickel a can.

I bounced from job to job. It was difficult for me to keep a full time job due to my excessive drinking. At the age of 22, I traveled by hitch hiking west to Calgary first, then onto Vancouver. Then I returned to Calgary. I started working casual day labor jobs while living in the Calgary hostel for men. This life style never would allow me enough money to achieve a proper residence. Therefore, I ended up living in one park or another, during the summer. During the winter, I would end up staying on one friend or another's couch. I would still go out every day and look for work or go to the day labor corner to make enough money to tie me over for a day or so. My drinking was causing me major problems. Homelessness was something I knew I could overcome if I could just stop drinking.

I met my daughter's mother here in Calgary and we decided to move to Vancouver to live with my sister. Once we were settled in at my sister's place I went to work for her husband pumping fuel at the gas station he ran. After a month, I was able to make enough to get our own apartment, then my drinking became a problem again and she decided to return to Calgary to live with her mother.

I spent my days trying to secure employment but again I found myself homeless with only the clothes on my back, I was dirty and hungry. I first spent two or three days panhandling in Gas Town, downtown Vancouver. I had made enough to take a ferry to Victoria on Vancouver Island. While staying in Victoria, I stayed in the hostel for two days, after that I was asked to leave. Therefore, I decided to hitch hike north to Nanaimo. This is where I spent my time living in a field and going downtown to panhandle, just to make enough to get something to eat and go to the bar to have a few beers. I met a young fellow, he

introduced me to the street drug industry so I made deliveries to different bar patrons for a while, and then he was busted. So I got rid of what drugs I had left then jumped onto the ferry back to Vancouver.

Stayed for a day or so in what they call Pigeon Park. Again, I had had enough of this and hitch hiked to Vernon BC. There I met a group of young people living the same life style I was. One person was renting a pickers cabin, he had secured enough money from the welfare system to pay for the cabin so in total there were fifteen of us living in this one bedroom cabin. We spent our nights raiding gardens and our days panhandling then drinking away our evenings.

Again, I had had enough, so I hitch hiked back to Barrie Ont. I knew I could move back into my parents' home for the winter. I spent the winter getting back into shape and working, not drinking saving everything I could. In the spring of 1973, I decided to ride a ten-speed bicycle from Barrie to Vancouver and then back to Calgary.

During my time back in Calgary I met my son's mother, we settled down. I had secured employment in a skid factory. We got married in 1973. She moved on and I again found myself homeless and living on the streets of Calgary panhandling on the eighth Ave. mall spending my nights living on Princess Island Park in a tent.

My drinking became a problem again so by 1980, I again had moved back to Barrie Ont. By 2006, both my parents had passed on so I again decided to move back to Calgary to get closer to my son and daughter. Things were going well but again I was still drinking fairly heavy but I had a good job making enough to support my drinking habit and pay my rent. Then one day after work, I went home to eat before going to meet my buddies at the bar. While sitting at home I had a brain aneurysm, I was transported by ambulance to the hospital, and from there I was sent to the Vernon Fanning Center where I spent three months in their physiotherapy program. While I was in the Fanning Center, I lost my apartment. So again I found myself homeless.

I found residence at the Salvation Army on the fifth floor in the Alcohol Recovery Unit. Problem was this was only a three-month program. While living at the Salvation Army, I was lucky enough to meet a young lady, named Julie Strom, she was a caseworker for Home Base (The Alex), and she was able to help me apply for AISH - due to my stroke, I was no longer able to work. She also helped me to secure an apartment in Columbus Place where I now reside. If it were not for Julie and the Home Base program, I would have to be forced to live back on the street.

This building gives me the security that I would never find on the street. No one deserves to be forced to live on the street. It is very volatile out there, most people turn to alcohol or drugs just to cope with the violence, which quite often occurs on the streets.

Affordable housing is a necessity to help those that are suffering from alcohol or drug addiction or a mental illness or all three. It is necessary to have these programs in place to help those who suffer making them vulnerable. A home is necessary so we do not freeze to death or get beat or stabbed to death while trying to survive sleeping in a park, alley, or dumpster somewhere.

Now that, I am a senior, I am stuck living on my pension, consisting of OAS, CPP, GIS and ASB, altogether this does not amount to \$ 1200 a month. My rent here is \$ 765 a month. Thus leaving me only four hundred dollars to live on each month. If it wasn't for this affordable housing offered by Bishop O'Byrne Housing, that I have secured here, with the help of home base (The Alex) and their assistance I would be back on the streets trying to survive and believe me I wouldn't survive long.

Thank You

John F. Kirk