

**HOMELESS IN KE-
NORA**
Volume VI

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**HOMELESS IN KENORA:
Wisdom from the Streets**

Vol. VI

*Advice From Those Who Have Strug-
gled To Find Affordable Housing*

The stories contained within this volume have been shared by citizens who are economically marginalized and have struggled to secure affordable, adequate and appropriate housing . Poverty does not diminish their value. Despite their everyday financial challenges, they have acquired wisdom that they wish to share with others living in Kenora. We appreciate the honesty and generosity with which they have opened their lives to us.

We don't have money or positions to prove we are smart but we are. We have lived lives and learned lessons that can be respected because we lived through hard times. We want to share what we know to help others.

OUR ADVICE

Help Other People

I sit on the top of the hill by my place and I see things. There's an old man who lives by himself down the block who I watched trying to shovel his driveway. I decided to help him so now I shovel for him. He is very happy that I help. Helping other people makes me feel good. When I was a baby I was left in a blanket behind the golf course. When they found me I had nearly frozen to death but people helped me and I lived. Now I help others when I can.



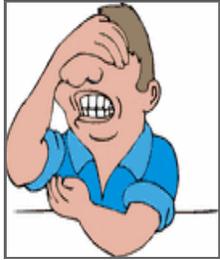
Love & Age

As long as you are both adults, age doesn't matter when you are in love.

Experience

We learn as we go. That's the way it is for us





Doublecheck Your Facts

Sometimes when you really think you're right and someone has done you wrong, stop and check your facts before you blow up. It saves embarrassment after you've blasted someone and then found out that you had your facts wrong.

Give Without Expectations

Unexpectedly and suddenly, I became a single parent with two children, no job, no home and no money. This was during a time when DINKS (double income, no kids) were on the rise. I didn't find help where I had expected to and had run out of outside resources. I had to walk through the welfare door. Fortunately, I had two blessings (besides the children)—I expected this time to be temporary and I had a good brain. With hope and heavy thinking, I sat down and figured out how to build resources in a community in which I didn't know many people.



My grandfather had instilled a sense of duty within us towards our community. He also taught us to give without expectations because then it's just bartering, not heartfelt giving. With nothing to more to lose, I followed his advice. I joined a church community and volunteered for meal preparations and rummage sales. Because kitchen help usually divide up the leftovers, I became the recipient of ingredients for many soup pots. Sorting for rummage sales gave me first shot at affordable goods for my household and interview clothing. No one suspected how much I needed these perks. I was accepted as a helpful volunteer rather than another poor person needing charity. It kept my dignity intact and met practical needs but I needed to expand further to generate a future beyond my current status.

I looked at various volunteer groups to determine where I could serve well and meet people who might be in a hiring position. I wanted to work in social services so I chose a board that directed a youth support organization. It worked. I served with enthusiasm and within a few months, I had some local references

Breaking Barriers

There's barriers between people in Kenora. The only way to bring those barriers down is to communicate—that means sitting down and listening first before you speak. When you come in and just ask for information you won't get what you need because you already have in your mind what the answers will be by the questions you ask. Listen to what other people have to offer you. Sometimes what they give you isn't what you thought you needed and that's where real answers come from—really communicating with each other



who pointed me towards a small job. That small job didn't pay much but taught me much and within a year I was offered another position at twice the salary and most importantly, benefits. I was on my way to a better future. I don't minimize the advantage I had been born with but I also have seen others with the same background, get stuck in poverty. Those are the ones who resent where they are, grasp tightly to what they have and sit waiting for a lottery win. Live with a generous spirit and you will feel rich in life.

Partridge Plucking

This is the best thing I was ever taught. My father showed me how to clean partridges easily. You spread the dead bird on the ground and stand with a boot over each partridge leg. Grab each wing and pull up. The breast meat will come out slick and clean. When my father showed me this trick, I was so excited I wanted to shoot more birds so I could do this cleaning trick.

Journeys

Happiness is not found at the end of the road but is found along the way.

Jealousy

My grandmother taught me that when I grew up and had a husband, I did not need to be jealous. If the man goes to another woman, he is hurting himself, not me so I don't need to be angry. The cheater will pay his own price. It works for me and I have taught this to my children. I see other women get all mad and its not worth it. Grandmother's way works best.



Respect



I tell my little ones to try to be respectful to others. Everyone has a heart and feelings. We should try not to hurt them. This is important to me because I grew up with disrespect and lived with it for many years. When you are disrespectful no one likes you. You have no friends and lots of trouble. Now I try to live respectfully and life is better.

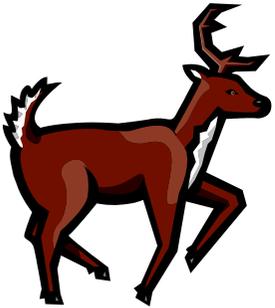
Get Outside

Get outside. Go for a walk. Ride your bike. Just do something!

It's no good to be inside all the time.



Deer and Decks



Deer will come right up on your deck. You can stop them by putting a chair in front of the stairs. The deer won't be able to jump over the chair.

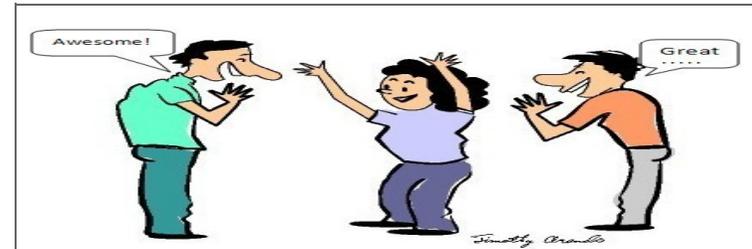
Kids & Bedtime

You got to tire them out before you put them to bed. That means putting them into sports or taking them sliding outside. When they are tired, they will sleep and they won't get tired laying around the house.



Don't Dis' Others

People shouldn't dis' other people because no one is more special than someone else. Just because you're up there doesn't mean you're worth more. Respect everyone.



Live in Laughter

It was an 8 by 10 foot room with a single bed, shared bathroom and kitchenette. My teenage son lived with me. We squeezed in a cot as extra sleep space. The real bed alternated with the cot—one night I got the luxurious real bed, the next night my son got it. I held down a couple of jobs simultaneously while my son hopped three buses to get to his school of choice (he lied about his address to avoid the inner-city school system). Today we laugh and laugh about our survival of those times. It's not that the poor times made us better people, it is about how we managed and the tools that we used to make it despite our reality as others saw it.



I had married very young and it wasn't good. I didn't have skills and I didn't have money but I needed to find laughter again. It had been lost under the weight of the mismatch and it wasn't good for either my children or myself. Some criticized me because I left a home but we need more than a rood over our heads and food on the table.

Our initial homes were worse—no one wants to rent to a single mom with three kids. First it was a small apartment with a bedroom and a half. Then it was a chalet with dirt so ingrained into the floors that we never went barefoot. The water was so slow that to wash up in the morning, I would turn on tap and go back to bed for

another quick snooze. By the second alarm, there would be enough water to bathe. Next it was a single wide trailer by the tracks that vibrated our toes. The search for affordable housing was hard but we persevered. Sadly, a single woman, with or without kids is vulnerable in ways I hadn't imagined. Attitude kept us afloat.



When you're laughing you're surviving with style. Once I won a lottery that netted



me \$1000.00. Of course people advised me to save that money because we were living too close to the edge. I didn't do that—again I chose to live with laughter. I took my children to the mall and for one glorious Friday night we raced down the aisles, tossing in linens and appliances and handy doodads. That frilly bedspread may not have been a practical investment but in that moment I invested in our spirits and that bears more rewards than a just in case bank balance.

I want people to take away three points from my experience. The first is to recognize that no one ever fully knows what another is living behind closed doors. Don't judge.

The second is to realize that as a community we have ensure that families are adequately housed to avoid the victimization that comes with homelessness. The nal, and best advice is to live in laughter. It is a choice that we make every day of our lives and through every setback. Trouble comes to us all at some point and we can either lay down and cry or get up and laugh in its face. Sometimes that frilly bedspread is all that there between you and naked defeat!



Live life and laugh.

Live With What Is

Wherever you are, try to get along. I don't want to live in a shelter but I don't have a choice right now. This is what is. Some people nag about little things that don't matter. It can make you crazy if you let it bother you. You got to get along together cause this is everyone's place. We share it so if someone's snoring bugs you, get earplugs. You're not better than them.



Sticking With It

When you find a job, stick with it. If you keep quitting when someone gives you a job, pretty soon no one will hire you.



Help

Help as many people as you can.

Other People

Treat other people the way you want to be treated. Simple!

Unpaid Work is a Gift

Unpaid work is the best work because it is from the heart. The good that you do goes on to infinity. When you get paid, it is not the same experience. People don't respect what you give them as much as when they know there's money involved. Volunteer!



Living In The Moment



I read something that says how I want to live my life:

Live every moment

Laugh Every day

Love beyond words.

That would be a good way to live the rest of my life!

Mind Your Own Business

This is what I've been told and that's what I do. Simple!

Stop Drinking

That's all I got to say. I don't drink as much as I used to and it's getting better. I don't make excuses like "they're doing it so I will too". You got to be responsible for yourself.



More Christmas

.We need more Christmas all year round. People are happy-giving and getting gifts. It doesn't matter what the gifts are, it is the happiness in the gift. I don't know why we only do it once a year. I wish I could give more gifts because it feels good.

Relationships Need Space

I don't like to give advice but my friend comes to me and I listen. She has trouble with her man. They are always together and then they start picking at each other. I've been with my man for eight years now and it's good. We give each other space when we need it. Everybody needs some space sometimes. When we are together there are things we do that are special. Sometimes my man takes me by the lake or to a park and we just sit. Sometimes he even brings a cool drink and a sandwich and we have a picnic. We aren't always drinking. When he does want to go off drinking with his friends, I tell him to go. He comes back. It's a good relationship because we've learned through our ups and downs what each of us needs and sometimes that's just space to be ourselves.





Defining Family

Family is not just about blood ties. Family is who you love, not just who you are related to. My aunt and uncle adopted and we have a lot of extended family. Loving each other is what makes a family real.

Make Christmas For Everyone

We grew up poor but there was always something in the stocking and under the tree. My mother made sure of that and because of that I've got good childhood memories. I'm grown up now with a child of my own and even his growing up fast but Christmas still comes. No matter how financially stressed we are, the magic still happens. One year a secret Santa surprised us with unexpected gifts. The phone was cut off, the heat was being threatened and the rent was overdue but magic happened because we believed. We need to make Christmas for everyone and everyone is able to help this happen.

I remembered my secret Santa year and even though we are poor by every definition, we've helped make it happen for others.

A neighbour was in hard times. My son and I gathered up almost new toys that



we cleaned and wrapped up for her children. I raided my own cupboard and pulled out some pasta and sauce. It wasn't much but we were contributing and I was determined to make Christmas happen for this woman. I had no money to spare so I went



to everyone I knew who might be able to point me in the right direction. One of my contacts produced the makings for a real turkey dinner. My pasta could be served on Christmas Eve. Then I found an Elf. The Elf found gifts and gift certificates. All of these were delivered to the neighbour who thought she would have to miss Christmas this year. It's not about what you get, it's about the magic of feeling cared about. Sometimes we give and sometimes we receive but we have to care about each other within our community. That's what

makes life good and that's why my advice is to *make Christmas for everyone!*

Babies

Babies have cute rolls of fat and water gets caught in their little crevices. If they are not completely dried, they get chafing and rashes. Remember to dry under their little double chins and let their bottoms dry out from time to time by letting them crawl around without a diaper.

