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EXPLORING PATHWAYS TO SOLUTIONS AND OUTCOMES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS - 2020

In order to better serve the needs of those experiencing homelessness, this initiative seeks to explore ways to link ***lived experience, practice and theory***. The goal is to create a context in which individuals who are experiencing homelessness, those who serve them; and those who have moved beyond homelessness, are authentically engaged in a discussion that helps to identify the types of solutions or outcomes that can make a positive difference to policies that affect the homeless sector. In the process of this exploration there will be in-depth conversations with persons with lived experience about the nature of supports that have fostered their resilience and recovery. This initiative recognizes that if you have never experienced something it is not possible to fully articulate what you need and that many people who are homeless, when asked what they need, would not be able to fully describe what is missing in their lives. There are questions that they cannot answer because they do not have the knowledge or lived experience that would tell them what a better life might mean or how to move forward in their lives. Therefore, an understanding of the “lived experience” as it relates to resilience and the “process of recovery” is essential to the conversation about what works. Through engagement with a diverse range of partners and stakeholders, as well as a review of academic and research literature, this initiative will explore a range of questions related to homelessness and the types of conversations and perspectives that foster resilience and recovery for those experiencing homelessness:

- What is a home (Physical address? “Where the heart is?” Being part of a community?)? Is it more than just four walls? How do we address the whole person and their varied needs?
- What is housing (room size, phone, privacy, laundry, security, day-care, access to healthy food, bathroom, etc.)? What is an acceptable quality of life?
- What does trauma informed practice really mean? What trauma has been suffered and what displacement issues have led people to become homeless. (Physical/Sexual abuse? Mental health issues? Loss of job? Loss of family? Drug/alcohol issues? Lack of safety? Etc.) People are rarely homeless because they choose to be. What are people’s “bundles of issues”? Rarely is homelessness the sole issue a person is dealing with.
- Who are the homeless or unsheltered? How do we describe the experience of homelessness? What percentage of homeless communities are men/women/children? Who are the invisible homeless? How do they learn to become invisible? People who are homeless are not one homogenised group that we might refer to as “the homeless.”
- What is “learned helplessness”, the “crisis of achievement”, and “dependent development”? How do they affect people who are homeless, and do they perpetuate homelessness?
- What is the empowerment and disempowerment of being homeless and trying to overcome homelessness? How are individuals affected by the loss of control and freedom at the hands of BC Housing, BC Benefits and other service providers?
- What is recovery and where does it fit, in terms of helping people to move forward in their lives in such a way that it includes their hopes, dreams and the pursuit of activities that are meaningful to them?

In addressing these questions and engaging in discussions with relevant stakeholders our intention is to provide supporting evidence for recommendations regarding optimization of supports for those individuals seeking to move beyond homelessness.

In order to even begin to understand Homelessness, we need to understand the history of each

and every homeless person we are to help. Even further to this, we also need to understand the history of Homelessness itself if we think that we can eradicate it. In the process here to explore these pathways, I will be telling my story. Because I am the author of this part of the exploration, the lived experience part, and because I have experienced Homelessness myself, my story will become pivotal in finding answers. My story contains all the parts I need to show what is missing in the present model of finding solutions, and what I believe some of the solutions are and what some of the outcomes can look like. The parts of my story contain: History, both for myself and my family, traumatic situations that lead to displacement and eventual homelessness for myself and other family members and the resulting outcomes from those experience. Then I will share how recovery, support and therapy changed everything for me. I will have some stats to show how dire the situation is out there in the Province of British Columbia. I will share literature written by others on this topic. I will show that there is a lack of resources and political will even, to make meaningful investments in the Homeless Sector. I will answer some of the questions above and share some of the healing solutions that I found in my four plus decade's long journey beyond homelessness. Through my story and journey, I will share the solutions and answers I have found to be of most relevant and why they are relevant.

So, let us begin, My Ancestors;

Now my story began long before I was born. It began long before my tortured, violent alcoholic father was born. Even before my child molesting grandfather was born. My story begins in a very good place, a place where all persons in the community could be relied upon. My ancestors were the Indigenous peoples of Northern Europe, Finland to be precise. They were also known as the Sami peoples, the Reindeer Herders. They were Nomadic and followed the reindeer herds. The reindeer knew where the food was throughout each season and my ancestors had a close relationship with these amazing animals. They lived in tent like structures which were easily moved. Everyone in this community of people had their role and was needed. They had their customs and rituals, signing, drumming, and dancing in their off hours.

Then a time came when another group of people came from the south. These people built churches and observed my ancestors, then labeled them as "uncivilized" not even human as they didn't believe in God. It wasn't long before this religious group of people took over and began to work at integrating my ancestors into this religious culture. They took the children away from my ancestors, to "Civilize" them. This was the point that displacement and this is the point where displacement and homelessness began for my people, then subsequently for me as well. This is the point where fear replaced joy and celebration that my ancestors had enjoyed for millennia! Enduring racism became the norm and my ancestors suffered greatly. They lost their ability to follow reindeer herds and lost their language and customs that had been a part of their daily existence.

The children went to religious schools with the children of the foreigners, invaders. They were persecuted and treated like they were second class citizens and unworthy of the kind of regard afforded the new people to their land. The bullying and racism were constant and relentless. These persecuted children of my ancestors became the parents of the generations of the future Sami people. They carried this entire Trauma and passed it forward to my Grandfather, Grandmother, then to my father and to all of his sibling and finally to me and my little brother. Also, some of this was transferred to my children who were also Indigenous and African Canadian from their mother's heritage? This was not a total transfer of Trauma onto my children because I started recovery when my children were very young. They were able to escape the full load of this generational trauma but not all and have had to do a lot of recovery of their own. My children also had to witness and contend with their mother's trauma that she suffered from, passed down from her ancestors and how they were treated by the colonizers here in

Canada and the USA.

My Grandmother told me many stories, painful stories told to her by her Mother and Grandmother. It was scary for me as a young boy to hear these stories, but I loved my Grandmother and wanted to know. My Grandmother cried a lot when I was a child and especially when she was telling me these stories. I will share some of these stories now. I will paint the picture of how all this generational trauma passed down to me created the perfect storm rendering me homeless. There came a point of when I was a young adult that a near-death experience made me desire a different life, one of recovery and to move out of homelessness.

The long journey to the Americas; A new land.

The journey from Finland as told to me by my Grandmother was one of escaping persecution for four hundred family and friends who made that long journey from Northern Finland to the USA on a ship across the Atlantic Ocean. Her mother had told her this story as my Grandmother was not on this ship. She was born in Minnesota USA two years after they all had arrived from Finland. They were excited to be in a new land, away from their tormentors, away from the extreme racism. Shortly after they arrived, they learned of the plight of the Black people and Indigenous people. Grandma said that everyone became afraid again, especially the men folk. She said the men got together and decided they were going to take advantage of their Northern European lighter skin and green eyes and they announced that they were no longer going to be Sami people, they were to only speak of being Christian, Finnish, white people like everyone else in the state. They could just blend in and not be tormented. So as black people were being kept as slaves and Indigenous people had their children taken away and put into assimilation schools, my Indigenous family got to keep their children. She said everyone was still very afraid and many grew very angry. Many of the men started to drink a lot Alcohol. Many moved to other parts of the country when they grew old enough to get away.

My Grandfather was twelve years older than my Grandmother. They too ran away from the rest of the family in the USA and moved to Canada, far away from all family. I found out why they ran away back when I was young, my grandma told me why. She had to kick my grandfather out of the house because, in her words, "Grandpa was touching the children" Which really means that my Grandfather was molesting his children. A question comes up for me here, and I have wondered, who had molested my Grandfather when he was young, right. Someone molested my Grandfather, my Grandfather then molested his kids and perhaps this is why my father and my Aunt, in turn molested me. Generational abuse just passed down from one generation to another. Because my Grandmother told me this before I became a teenager and even though I didn't understand fully what she was talking about, it gave me the willies, and probably prevented me from passing this abuse on to my kids. As messed up as I was Mentally, I always was revolted by the thought of damaging my children in that way. I also, did not spank my children, my father and his siblings and then I were not so lucky around spankings.

My Grandparents first moved to Winnipeg Manitoba where they got married. Shortly after that they moved to a farm in Saskatchewan and in a short time, just a few years there, they moved to West Central Alberta where they purchased a farm in the Nineteen Thirties and the farm is still in my family. I only remember seeing my grandpa once when I was six years old and he died shortly after that! So, I found out that my Grandmother was a single mother and she raised my father, aunts and uncles all eight of them, they were primarily raised by my Grandmother, until she had an accident on the farm and became disabled. Then the younger siblings were raised by the older siblings, and sexual abuse happened here as well. Word in the family was that my father was sexually assaulting my aunt throughout her young years and I saw my father rape my aunt when I was seven, my aunt was ten years younger than my father. This abuse continued into their adult life and is where I witnessed these abusive situations on many occasions, starting when I was five years old until I was fifteen at which time ran away to the streets of Vancouver, BC

Grandmother also raised me, mostly from her wheelchair. My Grandmother was the only one that spoke to me, so I served her, took care of her, emptied her poop pail and cleaned it, cooked soups with her instructing me from her wheelchair. This is how I became a great soup maker in my life. I was a good kid and always did what I was told to do. She did not speak English, only a mix of Finish and traditional Sami and this became my first language. My grandmother was lonely, and she cried a lot. I gave her a million hugs, telling her that I “Loved her” and that nothing else mattered. She told me of missing her parents, her sisters. I got the impression that she was ostracised by the family in the USA because of my Grandfather. She was the only person in my family that did not put me down or make fun of me. She was needy and it gave me a focus to survive my abuse. While I was helping Grandma, no one hurt me or hit me, especially in front of her. My aunts and uncles were often mean to Grandma and I would have to go into her room to sooth her hurts. She was for all intense and purposes the best part of my developmental history. The amount of empathy and kindness I give to people these days was wholly born of my relationship with my Grandmother and probably the reason I was saved from becoming a serious Psychopath which I bordered on a few times in my addiction, crime and gang life dark period. Harboring deep secrets about who they were, fear, abandonment, anger, resentments, sexual interference by Grandfather and older siblings lead to Alcoholism, varying from Mental Health issues, Religious Extremism and an overall animosity amongst my family members! My family when I was growing up became a family filled with violence and trauma on a daily basis. My father would come to the farm and terrorised everyone with his rage and violence, beating up his brothers and eventually me as well. He would try to rape his sister and starting at age five he often raped me if his try with his sister was unsuccessful. When my father was out drinking and terrorising the community with the Klu Klux Klansmen friends of his, his very angry younger brother was beating me up daily. I was terrified of him and he made my childhood miserable. He constantly told me that this was not my home as my father gave no money for my upkeep and that if he deemed that I had not worked hard enough to earn my own keep, he would send me away to the Mental Hospital where he said I belonged just like my father. He said if he had his way, he would have both my father and I put away. He blamed me for Jesus’s hands bleeding. He told me that Jesus’s hands bleed when I think of sinning, and according to him that was all the time. He told me that I was the devil and would burn in hell someday.

I went to school and because I did not speak English very well, I was bullied daily. Because I had very oversized clothes that were not washed often, I stunk and the school children and even some teachers made fun of me. I had no place to go that was safe, my only escape was in the summertime I would cross the swamp to the other side of the lake on our farm and stay there with my dog Lassie until dark. Then I would sneak back and go to sleep in the attic. There my aunt was also sleeping, and she would often touch me in my private parts. As I got older I would go sleep in the haystacks. When *was around nine* I discovered I could stay warm in the winter time in the hay stacks as the hay bales were fermenting and they were throwing off heat and I would not freeze.. Then when I was twelve a very traumatic experience changed my life. Up to then I was going to grow up, move away, find some peace brothers and sisters or even John Lennon if I could and go live with them. Just live in a place where everyone just loved each other. But at the age of twelve my uncle took that dream away from me. My dog had pups and as they grew and got bigger, he would always get rid of the pups. “Too many dogs on the farm” he would say. Then one hot summer day, he called me into the yard and told me that they were my dogs and I had to get rid of them. Long story short, he held a gun to my head and made medrown all thirteen of my pet Lassie’s puppies, all thirteen of them, one at a time by holding their heads under water until they were all dead. I had to carry them away and bury them; I just stuck the sack full of dead puppies into the back of an old abandoned shed way out on the property. My little brother, who was ten, was there to help me carry the sack.

That was the end on my childhood, my innocence, the end of my desire to be peaceful and kind. I began to hate that day. I mean hate, not a feeling but a state of being. Someone would die or get hurt and I felt nothing. I started to drink daily, steal from the store and gas station in town a mile away. I would get some old drunk to buy me alcohol in town with money I stole, and I would go over to the area of the Forest down by the river where the alcoholic first nation's guys would be drinking. They always accepted me, and I was a bit of a novelty to them because they were in their thirties or forties and I was twelve. They also never touched me inappropriately; one asked if I wanted to lay down with him but when I said no, he never bothered me. These guys were homeless, and I fit right in. When they asked where I lived. I said I had no home and felt I never did.

A short note about my mother here is also important. In nineteen fifty-four when my Irish mother was fourteen years old; she was homeless in the streets of Calgary. She had run away from an abusive foster home and my twenty-six-year-old drunken father found her in the streets and had sex with her, she became pregnant. The baby inside of her was me, that is how my life began as far as mothering was concerned. She lived in a trailer on my father's family farm for a short time but my father's violence made things very dangerous for her. She finally escaped when I was three years old and I never seen her again until I was an adult. My aunts and uncles never let me live with her, they said she was a bad sinner. They told me my mother was dead, that she was a prostitute and was destined to go to hell. My uncle said, "don't worry you will be together someday in hell" I just didn't understand, I wanted my mother, I saw my mother walking around the yard and I couldn't go to her. I was very lonely and one day when I was age four, I asked my uncle if I could sit on his knee. He hit me so hard I flew across the floor and landed on my back and he stood over me and yelled, "You hug a boy, you ruin him and make him a homosexual" I didn't know what that was then but I got the message, Don't ask for anything and I am really on my own now.

The beginning of the end.

In search of home: At the age of fifteen I could no longer stand the bullying at school, the violence and tormenting situation at home. I was tired of my Aunt always touching me. I was tired of my Uncle always putting me down and telling me what a bad person I was. He didn't beat me anymore as I grew bigger than him and had beaten him the year before, so he was now afraid of me. He only said these demeaning things to me when my Grandmother was in the room. So, one stormy, snowy October day I walked out of my Grade 9 Math class, just after the teacher had just humiliated me for the 12% mark on my math test. All the students laughed with this teacher and in complete humiliation I jumped up and walked out of the class, walked out of the school and onto the highway in front of the school and started to hitchhike to get far away as I possibly could. No money, no warm clothes, no plan of where I was going, just me and a determination to leave Alberta and never come back again.

Three days later, I was in the Downtown East side of Vancouver and the streets swallowed me whole. Within a short time, I had tried different drugs, sold drugs, started going in and out of prison. I sold drugs for the bikers and did many of the drugs I sold. I was raped when I was high by both older man, and another time by much older women. I slept one night in a church shelter, was molested by the Minister there and never went back. I did rob the church cash box before I left and was able to get a room at an SRO Hotel for a week. I spent several nights at the Catholic Charities Men's Shelter but never slept as I did not trust the other men sleeping there. I was too afraid of being molested. I would just stay up all night playing cards with the night watchman named Keith at the Shelter. With a long disconnect, I was reunited with this night watchman named Keith, and I am friends with him today!! Other than this my only other place of dwelling was prison. I crashed on people's coaches, sleep in cars, under stairs and always had a place for quick escape if I needed. When the effects of the early trauma engulfed me; it was only a matter of time before I acted out the same violence upon others that had been done onto me. Children live

what they learn. When I was eighteen and got out of prison, I had been recruited into a motorcycle gang. I was invited into the inner sanctum of the gang's criminal business and lifestyle. I seem to fit in quite well. I had been a drug mule for the gang in prison, as I was the guy that took the garbage to the back door when the garbage truck came. I would wheel my cart to the back door, hand the bins to the Driver, he would empty them and give them back. When the back door was open, there was a forest that I could easily run into and escape. I didn't run because in a strange way I felt at home here. It wasn't safe and I had to watch my back, but it was surprisingly comfortable. The garbage truck driver had left a package in one of the bins which I quickly shoved down my pants and I was instructed to leave that package for the guy in the bakery dept. and that was what I did. This inmate in the bakery dept. was a six foot seven three-hundred-and-fifty-pound body building biker about 40 something years old. He took me into the prison wing and put his arm around my neck and said to all the other inmates that if anyone touches me, he would kill them. He was a father figure that was kind of what I wanted. Yes, I was his drug mule and I certainly knew how to do the right things to please him.

I called him "Dad". He called me "Punk Kid" this Dad figure and the other bikers in the prison all met in the prison gym and my "Dad" told me to, "get on the bench kid" to lift weights, that he was going to make a man out of me. Every day for eleven months I pumped iron with the bikers. This whole prison situation I was in was the closest to a home I had ever experienced, except maybe for my alcohol consumption with the Alcoholic Indigenous men and the comfort, I felt with them. When I got out, I was eighteen and was invited to go to Calgary to join the gang there. My "Dad" figure took me in when I got there, had a biker birthday celebration for me. Everyone gave me money; I drank whiskey with them and felt so a part of this community of guys and girls. I partied for a few weeks living on couches and later found an old abandoned car in the back of the hotel parking lot and I sleep in this car for a couple of years. A couple of other guys also slept there, guys I partied with and did small crimes with. I always knew in the back of my head that somehow and in some way, I would have to repay these guys for their acceptance and generosity.

It was in the afternoon of one normal day of drinking and partying in the hotel where all these bikers hung out; it was this day that I found out what it would cost me to re-pay them for all the acceptance and generosity they gave me. In the Homeless world I used to call it, "the high price of low living". Such a high price to pay for feeling like one belongs somewhere. Now I see it as being groomed for a specific purpose. What I would have to do to have this acceptance and belonging.

A new face showed up in the baron this particular day and many of the gang seemed to know this guy. At first everyone was having a great time, laughing and joking around. This guy was teasing my "Dad" figure saying that my "Dad" was his bum boy in prison. At first everyone laughed as my dad figure was twice the size of this guy, and who eat him for breakfast, so not true at all. But it became clear to me after this guy kept saying the same thing again and again about my dad figure being his bum boy that someone was about to get hurt. Then suddenly, my "Dad" figure looked over at me and signalled with a hand gesture with a swipe across his throat and I knew what he wanted. He wanted me to wipe this guy out, beat him and throw him out. I was panicking inside, I had never had a fight in my life, was always the one beaten up. My "Dad" read me like a book, he knew me so much better than I even knew about myself. He saw the hate and anger and rage in me, he knew that rage was there and the potential it had for serving the gangs purposes. I was not sure how I was going to wack this guy, but I did not plan on losing my newfound family and I would do everything in my power to not lose again, even though everything inside me screamed to run and run far away, it felt so close to home, where I saw this violence daily. Thinking that I was just going to run out of the Hotel, I stood up to go walk out, walking almost past this guy that I was to take out and a rush of adrenalin came over me, I leaned into the guy, grabbed his head and bit his ear off. Blood was spraying in circles from his head. He freaked out and ran and I chased him, kicked at him and he ran out and never came back. This was a act of crazyness, wildness, it was just how

my father would have acted. I acted crazy like this to hide my deep sense of fear. Wow, could it have been that my father acted so crazy and wild because he was afraid on the inside, it made me wonder and gave me a way to manipulate my own fear.

I came back in and my Dad figure, sat me down, yelled at the waitress to bring me a triple shot of whiskey, he yelled "Whiskey for the man". As I waited for the whiskey, he handed me a bag with white powder in it and said take a pull a off of this. He said don't worry about doing lines, just stick your head in the bag and suck it in. I had not done Cocaine before and didn't know what to expect, I just did what I was told to do. After sucking in a lot of Cocaine, it hit me fast. Wow, I stood up and felt like King Kong. I felt powerful and in control. I felt I could meet every expectation my Dad had for me. I did never disappoint him except near the bitter end. I always did what I was told to do, just like I learned from my family and as I had done when I was a child. "Do what you're told, and you will live" was my moto.

My Dad figure had a job designed just for me. He gave me a gun and said I was going to be a debt collector. I said I didn't want a gun, that I would use a baseball bat or something. He just said suit yourself. I found an eighteen-inch-long half inch metal pipe and shoved it up my sleeve. I would let it drop out when I needed to whack someone to convince them to pay up. I beat a lot of drug dealers, all people, and all human beings. I beat them with the same viciousness that my Uncle beat me. Four years of doing this and as time moved along, and the more people I beat, the crazier I got with more anger building up inside and the more violent I became.

The bitter end; A life worth dying for.

One day I was instructed to collect a debt from a guy who my Dad figure, warned me was a dangerous, mentally ill ex-military man who owed a lot of money. I was to take a couple of the older guys with me on this job. I always went alone, no witnesses that way. It was hard to just sit and wait, as these older guys told me to do. When this guy comes out of his house and away from the dozens on firearms he had inside, we would jump him, through him into the vehicle and take him to the gang club house. Kidnap him in other words. We waited for a few hours and finally I had to jump out and just go get him. My real father was always sitting on my shoulder yelling at me not to be a girl, not to show fear, not to show weakness. "Show them how tough you are, get out there and do this guy" that was my father's voice in my head. The old guys in the car yelled at me to "Get back in the car." I kept going and when I got to the front door, I gave it a boot with my size eleven Dayton's and the door burst open. The crazy guy seemed to know we were there, and he was ready for us. He kind of hesitated when he saw I was so young, but he had a double-barrelled shotgun pointed right at my head. Not the first time that I was in this position. However, my father taught me well. He taught me how to stare down the most violent situations. I slowly walked up to the end of the shotgun, looked the guy, right in the eye and yelled, "Pull the fuckin' trigger" "Pull it, pull it, pull it man" I saw his finger come off the trigger and I swiftly grabbed the gun, turned it toward him, and shot the windows out to the side of him. He curled up on the floor and begged me not to kill him. The guys came rushing in and grabbed the guy and told me to get the hell out now. Then I realized that I had shot the windows out of this house in the middle of the city in the daylight and that someone was bound to notice, and the police would be on their way.

That was the first time I did not do as I was told, and I knew I was in trouble. The next day in the Hotel, one of my Dad figure's biker buddies showed up, handed me an envelope with a couple thousand dollars in it and said, "Jimmy, disappear" and walked out. I believe that I would be dead except that my Dad figure really felt in some way I was his son, and he was proud of me. I got up and got in a taxi and when to the other side of the city and went into a bar. It was a University pub with University students drinking beers and studying. I looked like I was out of the ghetto, I had most of all my front teeth missing, I had a thick beard, and long scraggly hair and I was stinky and dirty. I sat down ordered some whiskey. The young waitress asks me if I was ok, that I didn't look so good, and asked if she could help me. I

wondered what she wanted from me. I thought maybe she wanted to take me home and feed me soup, get me off alcohol and drugs and help me get a job or something. Then I thought, maybe she wants to just take me home for sex. I said “Yes” and she said great, my friend she will come and get me and we will go. When this other young woman showed up the both jumped into the car and pulled me in with them and away, we went. They drove for two hours North of Calgary and I did wonder, “Where the hell did these girls live, anyway.” Finally, they drove up to a three-story brick building and I asked what this was and they said it was an alcohol and drug treatment Centre. They told me to go in and get cleaned up and eat something, and they would come back in a week to see me. For some reason I just did this. I stayed for 39 days and these girls never came back. On the fourth day and from so much Cocaine, whiskey and bad living for so long I had a heart attack and was pronounced dead by the Doctor. I did come back alive but as a changed man. I desired to live now and to change, I found out in this treatment centre that it was not only possible to change that I had services that could help me change.

On the road to recovery and discovery; moving beyond homelessness.

I joined a 12-step program where I found many former homeless people who were alcoholics, drug addicted and ex-convicts etc. In my very first AA meeting I heard an Indigenous elder say, “Let us love you until you can love yourself” and I knew I was hooked. I went to many meetings on the First Nation Reserve which was next to the treatment centre. A fire was lit inside me, the help was available, and I flourished in this environment. I had come to my new community and these guys welcomed me with open arms. I left the treatment centre moved to Vancouver and found a sponsor the first night I was there. It was what I needed and didn’t even know what I had until much later. For seven years I enjoyed this journey, made a lot of likeminded friends. I still had nightmares and felt crazy a lot of times, but I could always reach out.

Then the hungry demons popped up and demanded my attention. I was panicked because I thought I would lose what I had found in my 12-step program. I quickly searched for help from Mental Health office and that day was sitting with a counsellor who would walk me through the next phase of my recovery and discovery for five and a half years! She was an angel; she was an older woman, a grandmotherly type woman, very wise who really knew her stuff. She told me on that first day that if I could trust her that she would show me how the pain inside of me that day sitting in her office, was connected to the traumatic things that happened in my childhood. I was sceptical but I was willing to give it a try. She was right and I plunged into the deep dark sea of my soul. She pulled out many hidden festering hurts that at times I thought I was going to die at any moment from the pain. Because of this support I spent the next few years with this woman, slowly the heavy cloud of darkness lifted, and I was able to heal many of my hurts. I was able to understand them, forgive my abusers. Through this journey I was able to start understanding how to take care of myself and find safe environments to live in. It has been thirty-eight years since I started healing with this woman and going through all programs and services I accessed to be here today.

This woman passed away many years ago now but her voice not my uncles, aunts or father’s is now in my head, and usually pops up right when I need it. I continue to seek answers, look for opportunities to learn and always be willing to help. I have had a home with my present wife now for the past twenty-three years. It was a labor of love, to learn and develop the relationship I have with my wife which is better than I ever dreamed possible. As this relationship got built working through the issues that were from mine and her past, we also have built a wonderful home and I feel very safe and comfortable. There still is maybe five percent of me still afraid I will lose it all, but my old counsellors voice pops up and soothes me. Maybe someday I will be completely free of this deep fear. But it still is beyond my wildest dreams and I feel so very grateful to have been given so much by my higher power. I am far from being religious, but I still feel God is great, I learned from my recovery program that “GOD” stood for “Good Orderly Direction”! I can certainly live with that!

I know that a person has to want to change, as we say in our recovery program, “recovery is not for the ones that need it; it is for the ones that want it.” When they are ready to get into recovery a month, two- or six-month wait can be dangerous. I want all services possible to be there when anyone reaches out for help and have hit their bottom and they are ready to change. I don’t think I would have made it if I would have to wait even a day to get into that recovery centre when I did. My need was immediate, and it was there for me and that is what made the difference in my life!!

In this next section I am going to use my story to answer some of the questions. I will show what it really takes to move out of homelessness and beyond homelessness and some of the services needed for people to make this journey. What is a home (Physical address? “Where the heart is?” Being part of a community?)? Is it more than just four walls? How do we address the whole person and their varied needs?

For my ancestors, home was a tent they lived in and could move easily when the seasons dictated it. For these Nomadic people, community was a big part of home. The people and the reindeer herd was also a part of their community. The saying, “It takes a community to raise a child” was an important aspect of their existence. Children were the next generation of adults and it was very important for them to take good care of the little ones. Community also took care of the aging as well. They were important as well. They were the ones who were relied upon for their knowledge and wisdom. Home was not just a place where a family slept but was all the people in the community. If one person was not getting their needs met, all was concerned and would step up to assist.

Now a day, a family is private, separate from the community. They may partake in community events but would have for the most part had to fend for themselves. There is a saying that says, “Let the family’s business stay in the family. If there was abuse going on in the home, people would ignore it, they didn’t get involved with anything that went on behind closed doors. Really this shuts out most of the community. Family secrets develop and children become victims. Those traumatized children then become the next generation of adults. This is a problem as these traumatized victims don’t trust; they become hostile, and uncooperative. This disrupts the whole equilibrium of the community and the community deteriorates. Then people go off to live on their own because they don’t trust, start using mood altering chemicals, acting in a destructive manner to themselves and others and this is the place ripe for creating homelessness. The whole person becomes diminished and their varying needs do not get met.

In my story, there was no community, my adult family members made sure they had their own needs met. The children (me and my little brother) by virtue that we were the children of the adult family member (my father) and the most despised brother who brought the wrath of hell into everyone’s lives on nightly bases, my brother and I by virtue of being that despised brother children, we came to represent this despised violent brother to the rest of the family because they felt powerless against him, so, they felt their power when taking out their resentments, frustrations and anger out on us, the small children. Because of their resentment toward my father (their brother) I was reduced to a burden upon them all. They never even called me by my real name. My Uncle had this name for me in our mother language of Finish, which when directly translated said, “Dumber than a Russian Boot”. That is what he called me most of my childhood. I was told daily that this was not my home, they said I didn’t belong there, and the threat loomed large that I had to work for my room and board. What kind of home is this, did I feel like I was safe and was secure here? How could I say, “I am going home” to anyone? I felt safer away from the house where the adults were. I ran away and slept in the haystacks, or I went down by the river and slept. Then when I got a little older, in my early teens, I would go drink with the First Nations guys and fall asleep on the ground with them. Nobody touched me, nobody made fun of me, they called me by my real name as if I was an important member of their troop, I felt safe there! Later, I ran away to the mean streets and slept on park benches in the city. I did not feel completely safe, but it was so much better than at my family’s house.

I did meet a Christian guy who said I could stay at his church as they had a few spaces for homeless people and there was a space for me. I could have something to eat as well. I had a delicious meal, hot and more than I had eaten all week. I had to sing Christian songs which I was not keen but it was ok. Then it came time to sleep. The sleeping quarters were downstairs. I had a shower; they gave me a few clothes that were in better shape than mine were in. I was grateful. Then I settled into a single cot bed and was asleep in minutes. I was awoken out of a deep sleep with the feeling of someone massaging my private parts. It was dark so I could not see who it was, but I was frozen and did not know what to do. I just lay there and allowed it to happen. I was so disappointed because I thought this was going to be different, I thought I was safe. When the person opened the door to leave, I could see that it was the Pastor of the church. I laid awake until morning. I gathered my clothes in a bag, went upstairs but did not see anyone and saw the office door was open. I quickly went inside and checked around for what I could steal and found a cash box. I popped it open and to my surprise there was thirty-five dollars in it, which I quickly grabbed and put into my pocket. I ran out the door and out to the street to catch a bus to downtown again. I remember thinking to myself, "I will never trust anyone again"

For the next seven years my house was either: in prison, mostly on the streets, occasionally I made enough money selling drugs for the bikers to get the odd hotel room. Not any fancy hotels but a room. I had one that lasted for a week one time. Stayed at the Catholic Charities Men's Hostel a few times but never laid down to sleep. I played cards with the night watchmen Keith each time I stayed. This homeless set up was created starting when I was three and built upon throughout my childhood. Now my conditioning was fully established, and I would have a hard time to accept someone giving me anything. I remember many of the people I met who were also living homeless; they too talked of stories of mistrust and betrayal. I felt at home with this community of people.

- What is housing (room size, phone, privacy, laundry, security, day-care, access to healthy food, bathroom, etc.)? What is an acceptable quality of life?

My ancestors all worked together to maintain a security that everyone had what they needed regarding privacy, access to foods as everyone worked to this end. Their quality of life was dependent upon the whole community watching out for each other and being fair minded.

In these modern times size of the place where you dwell, the amenities you have, security and privacy you enjoy is all to do with how much money you have and what you can afford. Some live-in luxury and others live in squalor. There is no community mindedness, no sense of fairness and equality. Acceptable quality of life is dependent on what each person wants to accept.

In some countries, a large family may live in one room. This family may live in a community of many families living in one room. If the community rallies together to find food, to create safety and protection of the children, then there is no homelessness. They may feel that this is an acceptable quality of life for them. In first world countries is where a glaring in-equality is seen. Some have so much, and others have very little or nothing at all. For some there is such a lack of resources and the people with privileges resent having to let public money be spent on lifting up people who are struggling. This may mean that they have addiction issues, ways they cope with their inner demons. Demons from being traumatized when they were children. Many of these traumatized adult children develop Mental Health disorders.

These individuals are seen as people trying to escape responsibilities. Animosity, resentment and disdain grow in the people that pay taxes and Political leaders want their votes and so these kinds of leaders have powers. Hence the lack of political will to create resources for the homeless, first housing, Safe drug supply so addicts are not dying of overdosing, then into conditions to help people in moving beyond homelessness. I believe this is the situation we are in, here in British Columbia.

My childhood is one that had none of these luxuries; we did not even have an indoor bathroom. In the middle of the night, whether it was thirty below zero or not, I would have to get up, dress up and walk two hundred feet to the unheated outhouse. But to go downstairs from the attic room where I slept, with my brother and Aunt, I would have to do all this in the deep darkness. To put on lights or even move

about would awaken my uncle who then would rage at me and hit me for waking him up. With a deep sense of shame and self-disgust, I would pee my bed each night until I was fifteen. They said I had physical bladder problem, with a mental problem as well, and that was why I wet the bed. After I left the farm, far away from my Uncle and my Aunts, I never wet my bed again. An amazing cure, I guess.

- What does trauma informed practice really mean? What trauma has been suffered and what displacement issues have led people to become homeless. (Physical/Sexual abuse? Mental health issues? Loss of job? Loss of family? Drug/alcohol issues? Lack of safety? Etc.) People are rarely homeless because they choose to be. What are people's "bundles of issues"? Rarely is homelessness the sole issue a person is dealing with.

As soon as the people from the south came north, built churches and formed governing body to govern the people which included my ancestors, my ancestor's way of life was destroyed, and displacement occurred. This was very traumatic for them. Their culture and customs were usurped and replaced with religious views foreign to them. Fear and then anger was a big part of their lives now and from this fear and anger grew Mental Health issues, addiction issues, lots of addiction as a way to cope with the displacement. They develop a pain management system, self-medication, alcoholism became rampant. Their strong, safe community was destroyed, and they had no community to fall back on for support.

In the times we are living in now, so many individuals have suffered traumas and struggle with Mental Health disorders. Having a Mental Health disorder is considered a weakness and a burden on society. Many Mental Health disorders are not recognized as disorders. Depression, anxiety, walking around afraid can so debilitating and the many other disorders are under-diagnosed. People live with these disorders until they snap and suicide, addiction, violence, job loss, abusing their own children ensues. The trauma that people experience, how they react to these traumas and how these traumas shape their thinking become their bundle of issues and then determine how they conduct themselves in society. There is very little choice here for so many. It is a reaction to an over whelming set of traumas that become hidden inside the person which then creates an emotional dilemma inside them which then causes them to paint the trajectory of their life with a tainted brush. Children live what they learn. If they learn that the world is unsafe and unreliable then they are compelled to live in this unsafe and unreliable manner, not realizing that there early world is not the whole world, the only world. One just projects their early world on to everyone and everything!! If you are taught from infancy that two plus two is five, then two plus two will always be five. Nothing will align and no matter how hard you try to see life differently and even the best intentions. Something will always be off, and life will not make sense. Then when they are homeless which is just one of the many predetermined outcomes, is that they carry the burden of all their issues which are really their past traumas, long ago put upon them without their knowledge or consent. Stuck in a perpetual cycle of self-harm until there is an intervention that will help them see they need help!!

- **Who are the homeless or unsheltered? Why are so many people, both male and female homeless? Is there a major issue that prevails that creates a perfect storm. How can we recognize this major issue?**

How do we describe the experience of homelessness? What percentage of homeless communities are men/women/children? Who are the invisible homeless? How do they learn to become invisible? People who are homeless are not one homogenised group that we might refer to as "the homeless." I would describe myself when I was homeless as invisibly homeless. I did not access many supports that were available for the homeless people. I did not trust people except others like me. I fended for myself. I survived by Stealing, selling drugs, doing drugs, never making all that much money but enough to pay for my drug habit, eat once in a while at the White Lunch Café, the cheap food restaurant downtown on Hastings street where others like myself ate. I just stayed away from authority figures sleeping wherever I could and stayed away from anyone that could take advantage of me.

Occasionally I got so high from my drugs that I ended up in bad situations where I was raped a few times, but as I got older, I just got more watchful of my drug intake. I started using drugs that would keep me awake, alert, uppers we called them. I used drugs such as Speed, methamphetamines and Cocaine, drugs that made me alert and focused, I could watch for threats. After all, I was a teenager and pray too many pedophiles that were roaming the streets looking for vulnerable kids. At present day, these pedophiles are now mostly on the internet. I used to joke saying that I was born with eyes on the back of my head!!

I was a homeless person, unsheltered out of fear of being hurt. I was a traumatized person like others who were also homeless and traumatized. This is what we had in common. On the streets we were ridiculed, made fun of, spat upon, beat up by citizens as well as law enforcement offices. People yelled at us to "Get a Job, you lazy bum". Bullies in school would make fun of me and yell at me to be different than what I was. This was a huge trigger for me, and I felt helpless on the street like I also felt when I was in school. I hated it; people were so mean everywhere to homeless people. You are not allowed to sleep here, not allowed there; go over there not here we were constantly being told. It seemed that we did not belong anywhere. Kind of like where I grew up. But at least here we could move about and find places to hide.

Most of the homeless people in the streets were men; there were a few women but not all that many. There seemed to be safe places for women to go and they would stay a while and then disappear. Occasionally a woman would go then a week or two later come back to hang out again and she would say only, "Too many rules". Present day the numbers of homeless women have increased to as many women as there are men.

Sleep, that thing that nourishes the body vs the effects of sleep deprivation that comes from living with Trauma:

Sleep or should I say the lack of it, now that was a huge issue for me. It has plagued me all my life, even up to today. My father coming back to the farm late into the night, what time, no one ever knew. When the bars closed, or he would randomly show up before bars were closed. Either way it meant a wave of violence would come crashing down on our house. Sleep was the lowest thing on the priority list. A normal night for me went like this. I would lie down on my makeshift bed, bed made of a destroyed mattress, with old cloths piled on top for padding over the sharp springs that were protruding in every direction. My bed was in a cold unheated attic room and was beside my aunts' bed. When she thought I was asleep, she would fondle my private parts until she had satisfied herself. Then she would go to sleep. A couple hours would go by, sometimes I fell asleep and sometimes not. That was when my father would come home, and all hell would break loose. Sleep is now been postponed until later sometime.

My father would fight and beat up his younger brother, much smaller younger brother. They would punch, wrestle and roll around and many times crashing into the fuel oil furnace which would then become dangerous as the float inside the fuel tank would shift and too much fuel would gush into the chamber where the fire was and the stove would become red hot, flames would shoot up the chimney and the possibility of it burning up increased when this would happen. My aunt would yell at me to: "go downstairs and make sure your father doesn't tip the oil stove over" I would run downstairs and find these two grown adults trashing about, banging into the stove and I was five, six, seven years old. What could I do to stop these adults (Father and Uncle) from fighting or crashing into the stove.? I could do nothing but become terrified that the stove would tip, and then explode and I would be responsible for the house burning down and everybody dying. Worst of all, I would lose my little brother, who I loved very much, I feel the same about my brother even today. It was very painful to think of losing my brother. I would lose my father or any hope of having my father if he would ever change. I was afraid that I would

then be sent to prison for murder, that is what went through my mind at the time. I would say this kind of conditioning through the night would not be conducive to having a good night's sleep.

On the nights that my father didn't come back, there was always the threat of him showing up. That threat was just as stressful as when he did show up. So for me, being on guard and then living with the fears and worries that would shift towards my Uncle. My father was the tyrant but when he didn't show up, my Uncle was the tyrant. He was always so angry. He hated my father so much and so much of that hate spilled over on me. "You are just like your father" he would yell at me. I had not done anything wrong, had not said anything, besides I was only five, six, seven years old, a small child, but he would still yell at me. I guess I reminded him of my father. How I look at it is this; my father bullied my uncle, my uncle bullied me!! My Uncle was a big scary monster, even scarier than my father. My Uncle did not drink alcohol, he was extremely, religious and made up so many rules for me to follow, and I never met these to his satisfaction. I was a loser in his eyes and he just needed an extremely small excuse to beat me up, violently. So nighttime when my father wasn't there had a different ring to it. If I had to go downstairs to go outside because I had to use the toilet, turn on the yard light and walk a couple hundred feet to the outdoor toilet, I was so afraid of waking him up. On several occasions when I had to do this, he did wake up and he would scream at me about how thoughtless I was and that God didn't like people like that and he would say over and over again that I was going to burn in hell. He would slap, punch, kick, shove me around until I could get away and go back up into the attic. Try sleeping after an ordeal like that. Most of the time, I would just lay there too afraid to move, so I urinated my bed, awake because I could not hold it until morning. When I felt emotional, I would bury myself in the blankets and cry. I was always afraid of waking my aunt as well because she was afraid that my uncle would awaken and start yelling up the stairs at her to "Shut that kid up". She didn't want to deal with him and the two of them, (Brother and Sister) hated each other as well. So, as quite as I could, I would cry into my blankets and pillow, pillow made up of folded blankets. I would literally cry myself to sleep and pee the bed to. I pee'd my bed until I was fifteen and left for the streets of downtown Vancouver. The house would smell like urine a lot of the time as my blankets did not get washed that often and my aunt would hang them up to dry during the day. My uncle would complain to his sisters about the smell and my aunt said that I just had a medical problem. *Am not* sure how she knew this, it was a bit odd, as I never saw a doctor my whole childhood. My aunt just diagnosed me to get my uncle off her back. I had a magical healing from my bedwetting problem when I moved away from the farm to the streets. I never wet my bed again after this move.

This is how I still need to cope with the Post Trauma of these sleep disturbance patterns from my childhood. I still wake up around midnight, one o'clock even today as if my father is coming in the door. I become wide awake, ready for the craziness. I also cope in other ways to many of the conditions I had to face as a child. Because of the cold winters and not having proper heating in the attic bedroom where I had my bed, I am sensitive to cold drafts coming in under my blankets if they are not tucked in properly. I am very sensitive to sounds around me and need an electric heater fan blowing warm air on me and as important, the fan sound is like white noise, drowning out the myriad of small sounds inside and outside the house. A dog barking in the distance outside, people walking by the house talking as they walked, late at night. The creaks and crackles in the floorboards of the house settling during the night. I used to joke with people that at night when all was supposed to be quiet, I could hear "a fly fart in Siberia". That is how sensitive I was to small sounds.

My bed and sleeping conditions must be a certain way. My wife sleeps under the sheets and blankets which is how most people sleep. I can't sleep like this. I put a large bath towel which is quit course on top of the sheets and blankets, and I have my own blanket over top of me. That is how I can sleep better. Sheets and blankets are making me very Closter phobic and can't sleep. I say have been sleeping like this for most of my adult life. On a normal night I sleep-in two-hour increments, waking up to either use the bathroom or go a sit in the dark in the living room to talk to my higher power, praying and meditating in other words. Many of my nights for many years now, have been riddled with nightmares as well. I have many reoccurring nightmares; however, they have diminished by about seventy five percent

over the years in recovery. I am not going to talk about my nightmares; they usually fit the thoughts and struggles of my past. I am just going to talk briefly about my meaningful dreams.

The Spirit Animals that helped me!!

I do want to talk about some of the amazing dreams I have had on many occasions, many of them reoccurring as well. One dream I have had on many occasions starts out as a nightmare but turns out good in an amazing way. It starts out with a big grizzly bear attacking me, chasing me, and I think I am going to die. Just as this grizzly is about to kill me, a big white bear, spirit bear comes out of nowhere and kills the grizzly. The spirit bear lays down and I cuddle up to it and I fall asleep beside it. Also, another version of this dream is the same grizzly is attacking me and a white buffalo comes out of nowhere and kills the grizzly, saves my life and I fall asleep beside this white buffalo. I have also dreamt about a pack of wolves attacking me and a big white wolf saving me. The amazing dreams usually come at low times for me, where I am struggling a lot. These spirit animals come to me and every time help lift my spirits while I am awake. It is usually after these dreams that I find myself more capable of feeling a deep sense of gratitude for the things in my life. Despite the different layers of needs that I have around sleep issues and all the work that goes into taking care of me it is so well worth it. Self-Care with regards to diet, nutrition, Mental Health, prayer and meditation and all the routines I have established to keep up my self-care on track, requires a lot of focus. I mess up a lot of times but as soon as I notice being off, I bring it back home!! It may seem like I still need to contend with a lot of Post-Traumatic Stress, and it is true, but I have learned to build roads around the obstacles. It is also true that I need to spend a lot of time carrying out my self-care tasks; however it is the hand I was dealt and I will persevere. I do not have the time to sit in blame of those who did me harm, like I always say, "Hurt people, hurt people". Those that hurt me were also hurt when they were small. They just never decided to heal, or perhaps didn't know they could heal. Either way, my attitude is that is to let them go, as they didn't know what they were doing, they were only reacting out the trauma they had suffered. It wasn't right for them to treat me that way but for them it was automatic and unconscious, not premeditated at all. Multi-Generational trauma passed on to the next generation, which happened to be me.

There were the many times in recovery and even now where I became aware of an injustice that was done to me and who it was that hurt me and then I had the job to allot responsibly where responsibility lies. In other words, I need to give back the hurt to whom it originated from, mostly in the confines of therapy, sometimes by direct confrontation. Letting them know directly how much they hurt me. Most of the time this direct confrontation did not work and often backfired on me. I quickly realized by the pain of re-traumatization in trying to talk to my family (Abusers) that they were not going to own up to their misdeeds. As they are now all dead, they took their own hurts and the hurts they passed onto to me, they took all to the grave with them. I still have a bit of un-resolvness to contend with but therapy was a great way to process my hurts. All this I have done and anyone can be do in the confines and safety of therapy sessions, where a trusted counsellor can empathize and validate your feelings and help you see it wasn't about you but about another person acting disrespectfully towards you. Then that person has to deal with their own behavior or not as it often goes but it is only your responsibility to work at healing and grieving your losses, the many part of your life that you can't get back, only to move through the grief work to a place that you can let go of the perpetrators and their issues. Then and only then can you build a new life. To get to know what you can change and what you can't change and then move on is the main task at hand.

All the past wounds can stay with you your lifetime. I say it this way, it is like they broke your legs, and your legs healed back crooked. You just learn to walk with crooked legs, but you still walk!! You still develop skills different from those whose legs were never broken. You can still learn to be happy if you just do the inner work and bring yourself back home to yourself. Then you have come home in a deep and meaningful way. Then you find a place to dwell, house, apartment, tent whatever, but you have you at home inside of you!! It is a process, and going through all parts of the process is important. I use a

metaphor here to explain how important being through is, so you want a piec of cheese to eat, but cheese does not appear out of thin air, there is a process which goes like this; first the milk cow eats the grass in the field, then the farmer brings the cow in to milk it, the milk then goes to a dairy refinery, then the refinery cultures the milk to make cheese, the refinery wraps blocks of cheese into packages, a truck then delivers the cheese to the store, you go to the store and buy a block of cheese, you take it home and put it on the table, then you and your family enjoy that cheese. What is the most important thing here is that if any one step in the process in the cheese from cow to your table is missed, there would be no cheese!! One cannot miss or skip or ignore any parts of the healing process. Otherwise you will have to go search what you missed and redo it. "Being fearless, through and honest from the very start" as we read in the AA recovery book, yields greatest results. This is the road less travelled, the difficult road and the road I have chosen. It was so hard at times but it did give me the results that I was promised. I will be forever truly grateful to myself, for making this effort on my behalf.

Brain Injury in the homeless population:

Now, I will speak on this one major issue in detail, this issue that in reality plagues so many homeless people. It is of such importance that I will dedicate this whole section on it. Here is some recent statistic: 52% of the homeless population suffer from Brain Injuries (Hwang et al., 2008)

In Victoria BC in 2016 there were 1387 homeless people, which means there were 721 with brain injury and 70% of these brain injured homeless people had brain injuries before becoming homeless. Also, 80% of the inmates in prisons have suffered one or more brain injuries in their early life. (The Cridge Centre for Family, Victoria BC)

To describe a homeless person's experience of being homeless is varied in light of the brain injury issue. Many of the homeless people that I met when I was homeless myself, I can now see that many suffered from brain injuries. We talked in the streets and I still remember many conversations. The twelve-year-old kid who hitchhiked from Ontario, he ran away from a sexual abuse situation, sadly a few months later a pedophile picked him up, toke him to Seattle and raped and murdered him. A Police Officer named Whistling Smith who was mean to some but was soft with me and a few of the kids, told us about the murdered kid. Then he gave us a chocolate bars and walked away whistling. There was the kid who said his father threw him off his balcony and cracked his head open. This kid would be talking away and just start crying for no reason that was apparent to us. There was the kid who said his mother tried drowning him in the bathtub on many occasions, he was constantly on the Grandville bridge threatening to jump off. The young girl whose father apparently raped her while trying to suffocate her until she passed out, which he would say he would complete the job, meaning she would be killed if she told her mother about the incident. Now when I look at my own high risk, self-abusive behaviours, brain injury gives me a context to view that behaviour from, a trauma informed lens.

My experience with brain injury was, besides all the other abuse I suffered, I was also suffering from numerous concussions all before I was fourteen years old, all from bullying situations with kids at school, my father, and my uncle. These concussions where from mild wacks on the head to being knocked unconscious from hitting my head on the cement floor that resulted from a body slam from an older group of kids on a least two occasions, being thrown into the raging river, near where I lived, by these same older kids. I almost drown as I did not know how to swim and I panicked, but I had some good luck and coupled with my perseverance to live I am still here. Luck came in the form of a large tree branch that was dipping down into the river from a big old tree along the river side. My thirteen year old body got caught on this protruding tree branch and I grabbed on and hauled myself out of the water. I hugged that tree and said thank you to it for helping me out. All through my life, I have had a love for trees and a love for hugging them.

These same kids often would punch me in the stomach and knock the wind out of me. They would also sneak up behind me and put their hand over my mouth and nose and hold tight to see how long it would take for me to pass out, if I struggled too much one of these bullies would come around in front and punch me in the stomach, assuring that I pass out. All these and many more situations of head injuries and oxygen deprivation left me with chronic headaches and stomach problems, stomach upsets mostly. When I got upset emotionally, my stomach would cramp so bad I often vomited. Stomach cramps so bad I had trouble breathing. I still have mild versions of this even now, forty-four years into recovery. When I was younger it seemed that I was always feeling confused, depressed and distracted. Self-loathing set in when I was around six to seven years old and the feeling that I did not belong on the planet. I wrapped a rope around my neck and jumped off a hay pile to hang myself when I was eleven years old. A knot in the rope prevented me from choking completely and my aunt found me and cut the rope in time. I hated myself; screamed at my aunt after she cut my rope down to please send me to the Mental Hospital. This lack of air was another blow to my brain injury situation. To this day I panic when I have anything around my neck or over my mouth or face prohibiting air flow, like mask wearing in a time of COVID 19 and I still can't swim, unable to go into water higher than my waist!

Belonging: Where do I belong, where are my people?

I never felt like I belonged anywhere. I grew up without a mother or father and even though my father came to the house daily; he was drunk and it was always late at night. With my aunts and uncles being tasked by my grandmother to take care of me, my Grandmother couldn't because she was in a wheel chair and my aunts and uncles did not want to care for their drunken brothers kids, they really resented that task. I never felt welcomed. I was there to do work, earn my own keep as my uncle told me when I was five years old. My father did not financially support me so I was again, on my own.

Then later when I travelled around, starting when I was about twelve years old, I would only stay in one place until I felt I wore out my welcome and I would move on. Never knew if people really wanted me to go, but I always felt unwanted, so I would leave. This was the hardest to deal with, spending a good percentage of my life trying to overcome my disillusionment, confusion, suicidal tendencies and self-disgust. Seven years into recovery, I finally got help with nutrition, diet, self-care, and psychotherapy which helped me deal with my brain injury and resulting conditions helped me with my Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Slowly I started to feel comfortable with people. Having a place to live, a house to live in was a bit harder whether I was living with a partner, roommate or even by myself. I often felt when someone got angry with me, for whatever reason, even if the person was not even angry at me, I always felt that they were, even if they told me they weren't. This would then bring up the feeling of; I had worn out my welcome and had to leave. It felt like the place where I grew up and the people around me. I felt unwelcome most of my childhood. I have left relationships based on this feeling, even if it was not warranted and the woman wasn't even angry with me. It was only my inner interpretation of maybe even the smallest of requests from her that I misinterpreted. I would just feel in some way not belonging, not welcome or something was wrong with me and I would have to run. I would be homeless again, but safer by myself, living in my car or truck, which ever I owned at the time. I know this because at least a couple of women I had this experience with asked me years later, "Why did you leave, I don't understand. I just went out in the hallway to tell the manager that my boyfriend got evicted from his apartment (A lie of course) and, she asked if I could stay with her and the manager said no problem". I thought she would get kicked out as there was a rule of no overnight guests and I was there every night for a couple of months. I felt like I had caused her a problem and felt ashamed; I bolted and never came back. I retreated, lived in my spot under the viaduct until the feeling of shame died down enough to make myself available to get into another relationship. Try explaining that to any Politician or Policy Maker as a reason for my homelessness.

Intermittently in the first few years in recovery I lived in my car; no one knew I was homeless. I was invisible and they would not be able to count me in a homeless count. I even had a job out in the Langley area unloading train cars full of household appliances and then delivering them to a new housing development just down the road. In those days many years ago I worked for fifteen dollars cash per day, a good deal since I didn't pay rent. I put gas in my old car and bought food from the supermarket nearby and then fell asleep in my car near the rail yard where I worked. When asked where I lived, I just lied and said I lived in town. I was an example of an "Invisibly Homeless Person".

I want to point out here that there can be a difference between the homeless and the unsheltered. There also can be a difference amongst the homeless people as well. The unsheltered are the ones who prefer to sleep rough. They tend to want to be away from people. Referring to the persons that sleep under bridges, on sidewalks or anywhere there is no one sleeping beside them or no authority figure telling them when to sleep and when to get up. Then we have what we most commonly see, where a homeless person goes into a shelter for the night and goes back out onto the street during the daytime. Some also live in their cars, trucks campers etc. They have lost their homes for whatever reason, job loss, relationship breakdown or dealing with a Mental Health condition or some other circumstance that creates a barrier to having a home. Some have reported they live in their camper truck and that is their home, a way for them to save money!! There is also a group of people that I would call homeless even though they are housed. This is something like what I grew up with. I had a roof over my head, but I did not ever consider it a home. No safety or security, no sense of predictability, no stability, because I could get kicked out if I hadn't done enough work for my keep, also no sense of peace and relaxation. I was always living on edge or waiting for the next incidence of violence or trauma to erupt, living in constant stress and turmoil. This kind of living situation does not constitute a home, housed but not a home at all.

I spent 26 years as a counsellor and heard stories of many people in these same living conditions. One story comes to mind about a woman, in her early sixties who was suffering almost to the point of suicide. Her friend made this woman come talk to me. When she walked into my office, she was distraught, almost wincing if I moved at all, it was like she was waiting for violation to happen and could hardly speak. I was a male in authority and I could see her fear, it was palpable. To sum up her story, this woman had lived with her husband for thirty-nine years and had raised two children. They lived in an upscale community in a large house with no money issue to worry about. I asked her what her number one issue was. She told me amongst many issues that the number one problem was that for all the thirty-nine years of marriage her husband always yelled at her and was always denigrating her. He did this in front of the children; he did it in front of guests that came to visit. He would yell at her to bring coffee for him and his guests. He commanded her and when she did not act quickly enough or took too much time to bring what he wanted, he would talk in derogatory terms to her. She felt powerless and told me she never felt safe and was never at peace. She told me that eventually the children treated her in the same manner as their father did. She said to me, I feel homeless, but I have a home, I feel like running away and never coming back. What is wrong with me, she asked me? I should be grateful for having a home, yet I don't feel like it is my home. I have thought of grabbing some clothes and going and joining the people on the streets, I feel it is safer for me there. There would be no one to yell at me anymore.

This was a woman, close to collapse mentally, thinking of heading to the streets. I would say that this woman is one of the invisible homeless people, just not someone society would consider as homeless. Her husband did not physically beat her, but she told me that she had witnessed similar emotionally cruel treatment by her father with her mother. Here again is another example of a traumatized person on the verge of becoming homeless. Her entry point into homelessness would be in her sixties but the possibility always existed over many years that she could have become homeless many times throughout her marriage and even back as far as into her childhood. She was just too afraid to leave. Through counselling she was able to confront the husband as well as her children's abusive treatment and was successful in healing and creating a good relationship and as a benefit, started to feel like she had a home and was able to recover. I will tell you one thing this woman did to change things. I

asked to go home and when her husband or children yelled at her to do this or that, to completely ignore them. To go on with what she was doing, even if they stood in front of her yelling. Just don't react to them. Just remain silent. She did this and in the next session we had, she came in very excited, and she told me it worked. She said her children came to her and asked, "Are you alright mom" she told them, she was alright, and that she would no longer do anything for anyone who yelled at her to do things. She would only consider doing things for those who asked her politely. Her children changed and coach their father to adhere to mother's request. By the end of the week, they were all asking her not yelling at her. She said she didn't know it would be so easy to change. She said now this home is my home, and she did not have a need to go to the streets. Her time in counselling with me was short and she blossomed in her life. She started doing art which she was never allowed to do before. She said she was happy.

Many are not as lucky, seniors finding themselves homeless at the most vulnerable time of their lives. Childhood, youth and seniors are the most vulnerable periods of a human's life and being female can increase this vulnerability. This woman's life was one of domestic violence for sure, emotional and verbal but still a violation of her right to safety, security, stability, peace, quiet and respect. Every domestic violence situation, whether physical, emotional or verbal constitutes a threat for those involved to become homeless. Domestic violence is constant threat of homelessness for the children, women and men alike. There are also so many people very close to becoming homeless. The term, "Only a paycheck away for being homeless" means that so many people live close or below the poverty line. They live and work at the whim of the markets, when the markets are up there is steady work and when they are down, insecurity, wage loss, job loss all contributes to the homeless population, visibility or invisibly.

Cars, tents, friend's couches, parent's couches, parent's basements, derelict hotels and more, all become places to land, sometimes with the help of Government, sometimes not. Sometimes people resort to any means possible to live. The downturn in the job market coupled with the lack of affordable housing creates a dichotomy for many people. The saying that; "The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer" really rings true. Now British Columbia has a Ministry dedicated to Poverty reduction, because this has become a massive issue to resolve. It is so glaring that many people are up in arms. There are people who have nothing or very little. There are people who have some and really fight to keep what they have, even become hostile to those who have nothing. There are those who once had nothing but are doing ok now, they are squeaking by, these people really get up in arms if homeless people move into their neighborhoods, and often are very vocal, so much so they have earned the name, "NIMBY's" Not in my back yard, no tent cities, low income housing, modular homes no shelters etc. I see the system creating a fight between all the people that are not wealthy, in other words we fight amongst ourselves and there is very little focus on what the wealthy are doing to get more wealth. This is a very dire situation and one that comes with no easy answers!!

- What is "learned helplessness", the "crisis of achievement", and "dependent development"? How do they affect people who are homeless, and do they perpetuate homelessness?

I grew up feeling helpless, I felt stolen from and so I stole when I could. I felt I was destined to be a worthless person and I worked hard at not showing people this. Feeling worthless all the time meant that I would never amount to anything, and this feeling dogged me for many years after entering recovery. I still sometimes feel like an imposter when I succeed at something! The sense of shame that I dragged around with me was like an albatross around my neck. Guilt is, "I made a mistake" Shame is, "I am a mistake" If you make a mistake, you apologize and move on. When you are a mistake, then there is something inherently wrong with you and there is no "fixing it". Shame is about hiding and not letting others know how you feel for fear they will ask you to leave, get lost, remove yourself, we don't like you, we don't want you around etc. It wasn't until seven years into my recovery that I found a Counsellor who on the first day said to me, "Tell me your story, tell me how you feel about yourself, if you trust me, I will show you how the pain you feel now is directly related to things that happened in your past" Luckily, I listened and trusted her, I very painfully told her all that was happening to me inside.

I had relied on Government money at times, often becoming dependant. I didn't feel good because of all the times I had to try and convince the Welfare worker that I needed help. I would lie about I had a place to live but didn't. I many times had to be fraudulent in my dealings with them just to get a little to survive on and many of the workers seemed so harsh, some even denying me any money. I hated the system, but was traumatically bonded to this system, becoming painfully dependant on this system, I believed I was helpless and hopeless.

There were times that I worked so hard, trying to please my employer, just like I did with my family. The harder I worked the more they left me alone and didn't beat me up. When there was a big job to do, no matter how young I was, I just jumped in and started working. If I was working on this big job, I felt safer somewhat. Some employers saw this and took advantage of this. They sometimes gave me more money and so I worked even harder. If any of these employers paid too much attention to me and I would feel like I was achieving something I would bolt. I was afraid of success, afraid of achievement. If I achieved too much, someone would come take it from me. When I was twelve years old a neighbouring farmer who owned a car wash in town hired me to go with him every Wednesday evening and I would shovel mud inside the sump, into an auger he had submerged into the sump. This would auger up the mud into the back of his gravel dump truck. This was a five-hour, heavy lifting kind of job and I was tired afterwards. He paid me what was a fabulous amount of money for this (In the late 1960's), in cash every time we finished, and he would then drop me back off at my house.

I remember things that I had plans of buying a bicycle for my little brother with this money. However, my Aunt had different plans for this money. She made me give it to her every time. I never saw any of the money. She said my Father owed her this money. I worked most every Wednesday evenings for about three years. Even with paying this money to my Aunt, I didn't see it as paying for my keep but paying of my drunken fathers dept. So when I succeeded, someone took it from me. These experiences as well as many others paved the highway to me becoming Homeless.

- What is the empowerment and disempowerment of being homeless and trying to overcome homelessness? How are individuals affected by the loss of control and freedom at the hands of BC Housing, BC Benefits and other Government service providers and policy makers?

The only empowerment I felt about being homeless was that I didn't have to answer to any authority. I was not beholdng to landlords; I wasn't being humiliated by Welfare workers and I could come and go as I please, albeit a very limited spectrum of movement. If someone was being mean to me, I could just leave and go somewhere else as I never had any ties to any place. Disempowerment was another story. I think for me what was the most painful was watching people who had homes, places to live, places to go when it was raining or cold out. People who seemed to have money or the means to buy what they needed when I felt I had to steal what I needed. I would often say, "What's wrong with me, why can't I get it together and make something of myself". I saw what they had as success and what I had as failure. I compared my insides to their outsides. I felt stuck in this most of my early life. It has been only in the last twenty years that I have been building something for myself. Being sixty-five years old now, I feel that I have achieved what maybe any thirty to forty-year-old may have achieved if they had proper supports and family in place. The only exception is that those who had supports in place would not have the knowledge gained through lived experience that I have garnered on my journey of rising out of the ashes like the Phoenix. It has been a long journey to get to where I am now, and I can now share my experience to help others. It has become my life's purpose!

The whole Social and Political system is either corrupt, mostly at the top or have no real motivation to solve the homeless problem except if it may get them votes at election time. They will promise the, what I call the "BIG Nothing", then once they are in power, then the same old same old. The only people really making a difference are a great number of dedicated frontline workers with big hearts who are not paid a lot for the amount of work they do, working for non-profits who rely on money that

comes either from donations, Government funds that usually barely cover the costs of just serving the homeless in a minimalistic way. Even though these agencies work hard they can't give homeless people anything more like permanent house except for a fortunate few. They can only afford just enough to keep people alive but still helpless. The homeless are victims of many traumas and conditions through their lives and should be cared about as if they were hurt children but the authorities with the purse strings ignore the plight of these victimized individuals. These days there is a term for this, its called "Harm Reduction" How could any of these traumatized individuals rise up when there is no places to live, very few recovery places to go, and months long waiting lists to those few recovery places available. The degree of loving dedication and kindness by all service providers, agencies, and sometimes even Government, is heartfelt.

I want to say I so admire the individuals and small organizations creating and bolstering the pier support organizations, and many of these are popping up all over the Province. Piers are people who have beaten their addiction or people who are managing their substance use and have first-hand knowledge of the needs of the homeless addicts they are trying to help. They hold meetings where the purpose is in giving many of the Homeless addicts, whatever their own personal situations are, a chance to bring their voice to the table, to have a place to vent their worries and frustrations, to be loved and cared about, it really warms my heart. This is a chance needed for many of the homeless to consider recovery, to break the barriers to trust that they have and bring hope or even a feel a sense of possibility to change or even manage their addiction so they can live a life that is sustaining. No conditions, no barriers, just that they are the most important priority, just the same as a sick person going to hospital, a child who is lost and afraid, victims of war, victims of racism, domestic violence victims, elderly people who have a hard time or can't take care of themselves any longer. A thought I had, seeing these caring people, working with such dedication, really what I would consider as the best amongst us, out there helping the Homeless, a thought that pops into my mind a lot these days, "What if there would have been these "Harm Reduction" teams out there back in 1970's when I was so vulnerable. Maybe I would have avoided years of anguish and pain. Then again, I am reminded that I went through all this, survived and now know what I know and have a depth to myself that I would not have had otherwise. A deep sense of gratitude for what I have gone through and all those that have helped me!!

In order to solve the homeless problem, homeless people need to be made a priority, the same as anyone one of us. The heart of our human race is in the weakest of us all. We need to help all that have fallen to rise up and we need to support them until they are walking with us again. If one human is hurting, then all should feel that hurt. After all we are all one. We need to deal with any of our own hurts and pains as these little monsters can grow and we will need to face them and process them and recover from them in order to see others as just as worthy as the next. We all have a story, we all have been hurt sometime or other, but there are those who have had support, some have had better or even good childhoods, and many have had opportunities to recover before they hit rock bottom through caring individuals making interventions, acting when they see a person is ready to change. We need to make sure that all these supports and opportunities, interventions are available so all can recover when they are ready.

- What is recovery and where does it fit, in terms of helping people to move forward in their lives in such a way that it includes their hopes, dreams and the pursuit of activities that are meaningful to them?

Recovery may be the most important process to help a homeless person to have good chance of turning things around for themselves. Discovery is the prelude to recovery. What is it that one needs to recover from? We must know what has happened to us, what we have buried in our past, far out of site, so we don't remember. Discovery is the process or journey into our past to see what happened to us and how these hurts are affecting our lives now. There is an old saying in recovery that says, "What you don't remember can hurt you"

My own journey began with my sobriety and after the withdrawals were over and I was feeling a bit healthier began a deeper exploration to what went wrong in my life, a lot of self-analysis, learning to admit when I was wrong and became willing to make amends where it is appropriate. A commitment to a life long journey of introspection, really exploring the root causes for my many issues. Discovering who I am, learn about my funny equations, what my foibles were, where I ended and others began. Discovering why was I so dysfunctional, why could I not keep my life, relationships and responsibilities on track? I had to build a support system with my recovery community, which at times was very difficult, as I did not trust, and I trusted those I should not have and didn't trust those I should have. I did not know what good, healthy responsible relationships looked like. I was very dysfunctional, meaning I did not know how to function as a citizen of the world. My counsellor said that I was functioning well in a dysfunctional situations, the violent environment where I grew up, but now I was not functioning very well in what could be a functional environment. She said that there were no abusive family members around to hurt me, no one to bully me like in school. I had a community of people on the same mission as I was. I now had a functional, caring community of people around me and I did not know how to act, how to relate, so I was now dysfunctional in a functional situation, functional environment. The trauma was now over and I had to go through a process of discovery which meant, I had to learn what I had to accept, what I could not change and come to terms with the parts of my life that needed changing and was possible to change. When I started looking at it all, this began the process of discovery.

What I discovered was I had good strong survival skills, skills that were useful and good if a war started or anarchy rained down on the world. I could survive hell, but it is heaven, it was times when things were going fine that I couldn't navigate. It is when things are good that panic and fear well up in me. The fear of the expectations people would have of me if I became successful, the responsibilities that come with succeeding. If I worked hard and I acquired a lot of money, would I then be expected to give it away, or be seen as a greedy ogre!! To feel guilty for having money while so many others had nothing! These were a few of my dilemmas and the questions I had from a deep investigation into my life. But I was seeing these dilemmas through my trauma lens. I had to learn to see things from a different perspective, a loving, safe and healthy perspective. I had to change my thinking. There is a saying in recovery that says: "You can't think your way into living, you have to live your way into a new way of thinking".

I had to look at my complete history and pull out the complete root cause, where it all began. I had to go on an inner journey to look what happened and when and where the dysfunction was first created. A person cannot live in complete fear their entire childhood, fear of being displaced; sent away to some horrible place, lose the few comforts that one has. Fears instilled by angry and violent adults. Being traumatized and becoming deeply fearful all one's early life does not give someone a great start to life. Where they have a home, maintain that home, or even know what a home is. What it is supposed to feel like? Well no one can really know what it feels like to have a home until they have experienced having a home. So, a process of discovery is really a fact-finding mission into a person's past. Until a person finds out what it is that they need to let go of and what to hang onto they cannot move to the recovery stage. This discovery stage is the hardest, because if a person has never had a real home with safety, security, a loving community around them, will they even know what they want? This is where a skilled counsellor/therapist comes in to help the person to realize what they have gone through is not normal. These professionals can point out where the thinking is in error and can introduce a new way of looking at the issues. Often a traumatized person has gotten stuck in a pattern of reacting to the people around them and don't know how to relate on a health level. So many people that grew up this way had adults in their lives, who also were reacting in a harmful way as well and there was no possibility for a healthy relationship to grow, hence now unable to relate in a healthy manner.

Recovery is always contingent on whether there was anything to recover. Most of the time it seemed for me in my process of recovery was I had to learn how to do, think, respond and think in a way that was a first time for me. Some things I had early in my life I had to re-learn but most things I was

learning for the very first time. I just plane did not know, had never seen, or had modelled for me or experienced the respect in relating to another human being. What do I do, say, how do I act in this or that situation which is normal healthy situation? I had to learn this fundamental knowledge; knowledge gained by watching health adults relate and how they treated themselves, each other, me and others outside their circle was paramount.

One of the most profound realizations I had was how abusive of a relationship I had with myself. How badly I treated myself and allowed others to treat me. I was my own worst bully!! I would put myself in harm's way repeatedly. I did not know how to stop myself from stealing from a store when I had enough money to buy what I needed. I would get into fights with people that I thought were trying to hurt me, real or imagined. Someone would say good morning to me, and I would yell, "What do you want from me". I would order something in a restaurant, and it was not what I ordered and would eat it anyway, too afraid to stay something, and then get even by stealing the saltshaker. I also could not ask for help when I really needed it, I would just struggle with whatever situation I was in, alone, triggered and afraid.

One of the biggest and hardest things to deal with was when things were quiet, whether I was required to be quite or just being in a calm environment. I would feel stiff, my skin would turn red and I would start sweating. I would be so filled with anxiety that I sometimes would have to leave. All these behaviours worked when I was in violent, traumatic situations. These situations had me on high alert and ready to fight or run. It was like I was always waiting for the other shoe to drop and hell to break loose! In the beginning of recovery, my old reactions just didn't work for me and would always leave me in a vulnerable place. I left relationships, spending days and weeks sleeping on friend's couches. I have even left all my personal belongings behind, never seeing or avoided seeing the ex-partner, roommate or landlord again, making me homeless again. I set myself up to be homeless many times, just out of old and outdated reactions. I believe they call this old reactions to new situations; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This certainly created disorder in my life. Therefore, recovery was so important and support through recovery was incredibly important. A lot of people crash and burn through this process fall through the cracks if there aren't enough wraparound supports. I cannot see any other way to resolve being homeless without these supports in place especially while navigating the therapeutic process. Looking at one's past can be very painful, pain that we had run from for years through our addictions. My counsellor put me into a Psych ward at the local hospital for a week or two at a time, just because I was so exhausted from dealing with all the feeling that came out. I would sometimes cry for days, out of sheer sadness. Not having a mother from age three forward, not having a responsible father at all, and having resentful adults that abused me daily when they were tasked to take care of me. I had lots to feel. Like I said having the wrap around supports was so crucial to making it through. I did have many supports as well as a determination that was unstoppable. In my experience not everyone has that kind of furious determination. Therefore, the supports are even more important than ever. There are so many Psychological obstacles and barriers in order to overcome homelessness. I would not have made it without all the kind and caring people and numerous agencies that were there for me.

I had to now go out into the world and practise what I was learning from my therapist, my therapy groups and my support groups. Many things triggered me on my journey to overcome these relationship issues. I would just take these triggers back to my support and talk about them, people would share their experiences and then I would go back out and try again. I remember my first time I stood up for myself. It was after a support group meeting and we all went to a local restaurant. I ordered a salad with no oils on it. When I got it, it had oil sprinkled all over it. I got up, remembered to breathe, walked up to a staff member at the front and told him that I had ordered a salad with no oil and this one had oil. He took it into the back and when he brought my salad back out it looked like the prep chef just ran water over it and shook it off but there was still oil on it. I told him; I wanted a new salad with no oil on it please. He said ok reluctantly but I insisted, and I did not have that rush of sweat or body flush I usually had. Just a firm insistence about what I wanted. Wow, this felt so liberating. This started me on a roll. A friend in

recovery once said to me, "Jim, you should wear a sign on your forehead stating, "Watch out, I am learning assertiveness". I laughed because I then realized I was being very strident when standing up for myself. It was like the pendulum had swung all the way to the opposite side and needed to find the middle. I guess in a way, I describe it as hitting a one-pound nail with a ten- pound hammer. However, my counselor told me it would equal out and I would become assertive but fair-minded. She was so right. I was becoming more functional, more resourceful, picking relationship more carefully and I felt less apt to react and more prone to respond. I was becoming more capable regarding creating a home for myself, really, for the very first time. Yes, I had many pitfalls but had people to support me, stand up or stand in for me. I was picking better relationships especially with landlords and if I messed up I would not run away, I would go talk, explain and be willing to make up for any transgression I would cause. I found people liked my form of honesty and ability to be upfront and own my own issues. For myself I found there was power in this form of relating. I am still learning things, things that are on-going, as there are people that show up in my life that are angry and want to take it out on someone. I would sidestep them; offer them a hand or something. Giving someone space to talk most of the time, calms these angry people down. Because I know I had not done anything to them, I was able to just be gentle and they would calm down. If this didn't work, I just walked away. If I did something to someone that made them angry, I immediately owned up to it and offered to make it right. They would either then just walk away swearing at me or calm down and allow me to give. Can I pay for your meal; can I buy you a pack of cigarettes or something? With these skills I was now functioning so much better. As time has gone on, I rarely get into conflicts. Life is quieter, calmer and I can live a lot more peacefully without my old reactions. Now I can have a home, maintain it and keep it!! I am no longer homeless or near homeless.

One of my biggest assets was certainly my tenacity and perseverance however my drive to ask for help was underneath everything. When I had my near-death experience, it awoken in me to a realization how alone I have always been. I realized I never ask for help, that I never considered myself worthy of anyone's time. During my near-death experience, I seemed to be mauling over parts of my life and how little I received from others really stood out. I remembered only experiencing a few random acts of kindness, mostly in my childhood, a few times were someone would give to me unsolicited. As I was out of my body and could see so clearly that these few people being kind to me was different and I wondered if this was the love that everyone talked about. I wondered if there was a place to find more caring people like this. I really wanted to go on a search for these people, wherever they may dwell. I do remember when I was a child a couple of brief encounters with a desire to be different, to live different than the people in my childhood. I did not like the meanness and violence. There were no good role models to follow.

The first time I encountered one of these desires to be different was when I was four years old. My father had wrecked the house the night before and caused incredible tension within the adults. Instead of saying, we have a drunken brother who is causing great strife in this family, what are we going to do about it? Instead of trying to find solutions, comfort each other and to confront my father, they just were mean towards each other, calling each other bad names. They were bickering at each other, and I stood watching them emotionally beat each other up. Suddenly, from inside of me came this scream. I screamed at them these words, "Why don't we all just love each other" They stared at me for a minute and then went back to their meanness.

The second encounter I had was a glimpse of a role model to follow when I was twelve. A new teacher to the school, who did not know my history, allowed me to stay and watch a film she was showing the class. Usually I had to stay out during film watching as my family thought it was a mortal sin to watch such things and made a rule for me to not watch films as they were a part of the devil. However, I curiously remained in the class, watching this film and what I saw was incredible. It was a man standing on a stage talking saying, "Peace brothers and Sisters, make love not war" He was protesting the Viet Nam war. His name was John Lennon and he was talking about peace and love. He was talking my

language. John Lennon has always been my favorite artist. I wanted to be like him for years. He represented love and kindness, he was my role model.

In a strange and delightful way, these early experiences of random acts, simple acts of kindness, began to serve as models of something good, how I wanted to be and how I wanted to be treated all the time. I wanted more of this and I believe that was the energy that ran deep through me and was the energy behind my drive to change, once I came back alive and I knew my self-destruct years were over. In those few minutes of leaving my body, I experienced my life's turning point, the point where everything looked different. I started to ask questions, started to ask for help and if at first, I could not get answers or get help, I just persevered and ask someone else until I got answers and got help. I never stopped searching for answer, for question to ask, for any kind of solutions or tricks or tips. I became like a sponge, soaking up anything that would help me discover and recover!! I have not dealt with everything, there is always something to look at and work on. The process is ongoing, and I am not sure if there is ever an end or at least I don't know anyone who says they have completed dealing with all their past issues.

However, slowly with my own voracious drive, the willingness to reach out for help when I was stuck, the help of my absolutely incredible counsellor and the constant support from my peers in all the support groups I attended, the many role models and mentors, the hundreds of (self-help, psychology, philosophy and people's stories) books I have read, I have overcome most of the issues that were in the way of me being a responsible, caring and kind citizen!!

I also know that not everyone has that drive, the drive that keeps pushing me to look and change. There are so many that give up if support wasn't available immediately for them to start their recovery process. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that recovery support is there when a traumatized individual is ready to make changes to their lives. This is whether someone is homeless, consumed by their addiction or suffering from a mental health condition. These recovery opportunity's in my view is the piece that is most glaringly missing from the solution to homelessness. Very little money and emphasis is placed on this by policy makers, political rulers and the like. Even a segment of the public wants quick fixes so they can't see the problems sitting in front of their face. They want a quicker, faster, quick fix way to get rid of the problems, to hide it rather than spend the time and resources to help people deal with it. Nothing is better than when someone hits their bottom and wants to change, and the help is available right away. So many people die, deteriorating health, overdosing, committing suicide or even murder, fall through the cracks and get even more bitter and mistrusting when they are told, "We will put you on our waitlist, and probably it will be 3 weeks, months or....." This to me is unacceptable and shows lack of caring by those in power, elected by the people to create a resolve, who could put in motion, to take action to build a place of healing, many places, as many that is needed!!

Beyond Homelessness!

The Long Journey Home, the process of building a home!!

So, from all the previous commentary and exploration, a question still dogs me. A question that is rarely asked, that question is; "How do we build a home" I understand why it is rarely asked, it is because many do not turn it all around and live out the rest of their lives creating a home. I am not talking about, bricks, mortar, saws and hammers building a home, which is housing. Housing is very important as well, but others can build it for you. I totally believe in the Housing First model because without having a roof over one's head we cannot start the process that I am going to explain next. When I am speaking of building a home, it all starts first from the inside of you. It is a building of the heart, mind and soul, mental, physical and spiritual. Not religious but spiritual, of your spirit that got abused out of you at an earlier time.

"How can we build a home for ourselves?" Home is where it is safe, secure and stable. The three S's of having a home. These three S's should have started when you were a child. If there is abuse, trauma

in the home, it is not a home. This means there was no safety, security or stability for the child to grow up in. Living with abuse is like living in a war. Never really know who and where the enemy is at anytime. It means the child who has very little resources, anyway, has to navigate through this mine field of abuse and trauma all by themselves. The child must become hypervigilant, watching for the vein in an angry person's neck which would alert them when to hit the floor to miss the flying fist. Watching for a string of words, cruelly flung at you, trying to smash the tiny bit of self-esteem the child is hiding in a deep place to keep it safe, smashed away until there is none left. It was always watching for potential abuse coming your way. Always on guard, never at peace, never resting!! It is like a radio that is on all the time and is never turned off. Enduring abuse fractures a person's psyche and you lose touch with one's self amongst many other effects. However, a broken psyche is the root cause of chronic homelessness and that broken psyche must be repaired through recovery and healing. Losing touch with your true self is like walking into a room of strangers, putting your back against the wall, watching how everyone is acting and relating, then leave the wall and acting and relating just like everyone else to make sure you fit in, this is how you can be safe, but at what price. Pretending you are someone you are not. The sad part about this, you left yourself, who you really are back at the wall. Then you never go back and get yourself, you just get lost in survival. Playing roles to keep safe, secure and stable, pretending, this is very exhausting. . It isn't really; safe, secure and stable; you just fool yourself into believing that it is. Building a home is going back to where you left yourself at the wall to bring back home inside the person you really are, who you were born as. To know thyself is true wealth, someone once said. If you want to attract safe, secure and stable people, you must become one yourself. Home starts inside of each of us first.

The journey to get one's self back is as individual and unique as there are people in the world. Supports have to be tailored to each individual and their set of unique needs. Client centre they call it. We are all different and our support people have to be flexible and diverse. We have our own sensitivity levels and how we react to different events in our lives. Some get beaten senseless and are able to bounce back while others have a small crisis and have a complete mental breakdown. No one knows why but it is a fact. So supports have to reflect these different psychological needs that arise from each person. I was the type of person that took a licking and kept on ticking. But an end did come for me and I succumbed to the inner trauma build up. I had a near death experience, almost died, which gave me my reset point!!

My journey back to myself, my journey home!!

As I was lying in the hospital bed, having just been told that I had died and came back alive, a big bunch of questions came across my mind. "Why am I still alive, who am I, and do I want to live?" "Yes, I want to live, but how do I do that," came the answer from inside me. At that moment I knew I wanted to change my life. To go on a journey like this, everyone always has to want to change their life or at least have a strong convincing intervention. As we used to say in recovery, recovery is not for the ones that need it, it's for the ones that want it. I wanted it badly but I had no idea how I would do this, but I didn't care. I said this saying in the beginning that I will always remember, I said to anyone who would listen, "If I have to crawl on broken glass on my bare belly for the next five years to get past all my bad feeling, I will" and in some respects it felt like I did just that. Wow, what a painful road I had chosen. The only way through it is through it, I was told. Recovery had begun. I was getting myself back, reclaiming myself and in very big way, getting to be the self that I had never had an opportunity to become. Getting to know myself and developing a relationship with myself.

This process is the key to recovery and is the end goal of this journey. The journey perhaps never ends, as we are always growing and learning new ways of functioning in an ever-changing world. The process helps us to acquire the skills we need to live life and this process, once developed, actualized and maintained and having the resources and supports became paramount to accomplishing this monumental task of living the good life and passing it onto our children. By going through this process of recovering,

developing skills to live, putting all you have learned to into action, to a point of being able to maintain it, is a lifelong process. By building and learning I would start becoming the first member of my own new community, and community makes a home possible. I believe you cannot have a relationship with anyone, I am speaking of a sustaining kind of relationship, a healthy relationship until you develop a healthy, sustaining relationship with yourself. If you don't have loving, caring and kind people in your life IE: your community, you cannot create a home, one that is made up of the three S's, safe, secure and stable. You must find yourself and become loving, caring and kind to yourself. Then you will attract loving, caring and kind people. We are always teaching people how to treat us by how we treat ourselves and what we allow people to do to us.

How did I build a relationship with myself, what was that like?

It was like one hundred long lengths of rope, all the same color all snarled up together in a big heap. No color coding to be able to see where one ends and another begins. It was a tedious job with a lot of help from professionals and support groups helping to untangle the ropes, one at a time, one day at a time. Patience is a virtue they say, well this required just that. Along the journey I quickly learned to look forward to the OMG moments, when some aspect of my life would become clear and I would finally understand the whys. It was only at these moments I could celebrate a little and feel at rest for a short while. There were a lot more questions coming up than there were answer, especially the first five or so years. There was a month of agonizing digging for the truth, and two days of celebration. This was the way I found it worked for me. I was highly driven, I wanted to know the why's and how's etc. I wanted to change more than anything in the world. Without my support system I am sure I would have stumbled and fell. It was like I was running in the dark with no direction and my support people would guide me. I had to be hospitalized from exhaustion a number of times, just so I could rest. The feeling that came up, sometimes erupting like a volcano, really hit me hard. I would sometimes cry for days without stopping except when I got so tired, I would collapse. Wake up and get back at it. I read dozens of books, therapy Twice weekly for years, group therapy twice weekly and many self-help meetings; I started writing in journals, just to get things outside my head and on paper as was the suggestion of my counsellor.

As I unravelled my life, I was shocked at how I could have been so misled, I trusted, because I had no choice. That is what it is like not having support, no one to guide your direction. But started to understand how I would make the choices I made. As I saw what had happened to me, I started having compassion for myself, probably for the first time. I learned that I was not a stupid idiot like I was told and then how I then saw myself. I was not a loser as the kids in school called me. I was a wounded child with no support, no guidance, nowhere to run and nowhere to hide, nowhere to escape where it was safe. I was a child with no home!! It was the place where homelessness entered my life and there was no one to care, I was on my own.

This is where my journey began, my process. Getting to the root cause of my homelessness, my addictions and my Mental Health issues was and still is my process. It continues, I still have rocks that I have not turned over to see what is under them. I think I am done, and I feel pretty good and then something triggers me and I feel pain and don't know why, I start on another search to find answers. I call it, "Same shit, different pile, deeper pile." Many people that know me say to me, gee Jim, you have been in therapy for years, and you're not over it all yet, how come? Well, I can't answer that. I just know that people have such expectations to just get over it all. As the years have gone by, I have become more functional, more able to cope with changes. I have been in a relationship for over twenty two years now and it is working well. Before this one, all my relationships lasted anywhere from a few months to about three years. They just crashed and burned, and I didn't know why.

In the last two relationships the women said to me, most women would not want to be with you because you are always asking questions, always wanting to work on "Our" relationship, always wanting to talk about things. I did not feel safe, secure or stable with them, so just wanted to talk and figure out

what was wrong and fix it. Now I realize that there are some people who don't want to work on issues. I also realize that I picked dysfunctional partners who had suffered abuse in some ways but who had always had a home with some supports. I had always felt like I was the messed up one and they were doing alright and I just had to do it right, be good enough to be with them. I never felt good enough. If everyone was doing it 100% of their best, I had to do it 150% just to feel some equality.

Then I spent 5 years on my own, just raising my kids and staying away from partner relationships. That was where I discovered that I was always working on myself and my issues and I would outgrow my partner and needed to move on. I would attract women who were at my level of growth and they had stopped looking at their own issues. This is when they would start criticizing me and that was the end of the relationship, but I wanted to somehow fix it, but they didn't think it was about them at all, just me!! Having five years to process on my own loneliness and feeling that I could not live without a partner was so necessary which allowed me to reach out to professionals for help and I got the help I needed. I found out the patterns I was repeating were similar to the relationship patterns of my childhood. The more I talked about my issues in the relationship the more distant emotionally my partner would become. The more distant they became the harder I worked at trying to figure out what was wrong with me and how and what I could do to make them come closer.

Original relationship, where the patterns started, my relationship story

Some of what I am going to talk about here I have mentioned before in previous sections but bear with me. The relationship patterns I just spoke of in the previous section came from the first female relationship I had as a child. My aunt was my mother figure as my mom left when I was so small I didn't remember her. She ran because my drunken father would beat her, and she was afraid and very young. So, my aunt was my mother figure and she did not want the job. My grandmother, my aunt's mother practically made my aunt take care of me. So, during the day, she was mean to me and emotionally distant and I wanted her to hug me, and tell me I was loved etc. and she would not do this. At night she touched me sexually inappropriately, so this was very confusing. Also, my drunken father was always trying to touch her sexually and she hated him, and she said I reminded her of him. My father also got me a number of times sexually as well. I always felt not good enough around her and my father. I was just someone to be used for what they needed. Sex to me was a commodity, something big people wanted, and I had. I could barter it away, usually getting the short end of the stick, no pun intended, never getting what I wanted or needed. My uncle, my father's younger brother was also in the house and my father would come in drunk and beat him up. So, he then in turn beat me every day.

When I was four years old, I tapped on his knee and asked if I could sit on his knee. He hit me hard, sending flying across the room, and when I was lying on the floor, he stood over me and yelled, "You hug a boy, you ruin him, make him a homosexual." I never asked again for anything from him again. The older I got the meaner he got. When I was twelve, he held a gun to my head and made me drown my puppies by holding their heads under water until they were dead. That was the moment when something inside of me broke. I started stealing, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, skipping school. I started rebelling and running away, sleeping in the haystack, on the riverbank and drinking alcohol with the First Nation men that drank down on the riverbank. Even saw my father down there once. I was well on my way to becoming chronically homeless by then.

As I talked about in a previous chapter: I never had a role model, someone to look up to. There was a day that I was at school and I was in my classroom and the teacher did not make me leave as usual when the class was about to watch a film. Teachers always asked me to sit outside when they were going to watch a film or do Art or have a P.E. class. My aunt who was religious said films, Art and sports were a sin and she didn't want me to participate. So, I always sat outside in my desk. But on this day, the teacher was new, and she didn't ask me to leave so I watched my first film, I was twelve years old. The film, I

remember was this man standing there with his arms raised up in the air giving the peace sign and yelling, "Make love not war" and I thought, omg, he believes in peace and love, I immediately want to be like him. I wanted to go a find him. His name was John Lennon and he was my hero!

So, at fifteen, I decided to run far away, go find John Lennon and his friends and go live with them. I travelled for three days, not knowing where I was going, just going anywhere away from where all these mean people were. When I finally stopped, I was in the downtown east side of Vancouver. I had never been to a big city. Here I was roaming the streets; I was homeless, sleeping in alleys and on benches. I was approached to sell drugs for the bikers, which gave me a few dollars, not enough to live on but I could sit in all night café's or all-night theatres to keep warm. I arrived in late October and it was cold and rainy. I soon started doing some of the drugs I sold and before long was arrested by the police and was put in prison. I was in and out of prison on numerous occasions and my drug and alcohol intake was up the more I was homeless. Finally, I landed in a gang, in prison and they made me feel welcome and I thought, this was what good friends and relationships look like. They were much older than me and for the first time I had adult men in my life that did not beat me up or want sex from me. I was their drug mule in prison, which was not a hard job but because I transport drugs from one area of the prison to another for them, they took care of me. The guy I did this for was about forty-five years old and was six foot seven and weighed three hundred and fifty pounds. He was big and I called him "Dad" and I think he liked that. In prison, he gave me my first hug. It wasn't a cuddly little mommy hug, it was a man's hug. It was a hard hug, slapping me on the back and almost knocking the wind out of me. He said, come with me and my buddies down to the weightlifting pit so we can make a man out of you. They were in their thirties and forties and I was seventeen. From that time until I had my near death experience, I was one of them. As long as I did what I was told to do, I was respected. That wasn't a problem, as that was what I did growing up as a child. I always did what I was told to do, hoping for some respect but never got that respect. Now, as a gang member, I did what I was told to do, and I got respect, a least it felt like it. I became a debt collector for the gang and beat people that owed the gang money.

However, I still was homeless. I sleep in abandoned cars, on people's couches, in other people's Hotel rooms, but only temporarily. People would ask me where I lived and I would always reply, "Everywhere" really, I did not live with anyone because I did not trust anyone. Never found anyone remotely interested in me as a person, not sure who I was but no one asked me what I needed. I was still on my own. Then for me this lifestyle, living homeless, drinking alcohol, snorting Cocaine, spending my days in bars eating pizza, eating things with low nutritional value nailed me. I ended up having to leave the gang for a while, kicked out for being too crazy and violent. I did not do what I was told one day, and this mistake brought police looking for me and the gang was not happy. I left again, with nowhere to go. I ended up in an alcohol drug treatment hospital, at the request of a couple of women, who said after I go in and get cleaned up, they would come get me. I did what I was told to again. I died from a heart attack from doing too much Cocaine, an overdose, but I was fortunate to come back alive. I got clean; the women never came back to get me and the fantasy of having a relationship with two women at once did not materialize. The important thing was I now had a mind to changing my life.

With the help of Alcoholics Anonymous and a few members of the hospital staff I made an important decision that day. The head doctor who was in her sixties, in that hospital that day was surprised and quite impressed that I came back alive. She said to me that day, "You are still a kid, I don't understand how you have gotten so wrecked but promise me one thing, promise me you will go out and find out why you got so wrecked." I will always remember her, and I have kept that promise I made to her that day. While I in that treatment hospital, the patients were allowed to jump into a van that pulled up offering to take anyone that wanted to go to a Alcohol Anonymous meeting on a First Nation reserve near the hospital. I said yes and nervously started to attend nightly these AA meetings. I found myself being accepted by a group of people recovery from alcohol problems, some of them had been homeless etc. but I understood them and they understood me. I fit in and I did not have to do what I was told to do except they said, "Keep coming back." I wanted to keep going back. I finally got out of this treatment

hospital and went back to Vancouver to carry on going to meetings. My journey of recovery had begun. I was twenty-two years old.

I meet an older man at the first meeting in Vancouver and asked him to be my sponsor, he said yes, and asked where I was living. I said I had enough to stay in a hotel room for a couple weeks but would have to look for a place after that. He said he had a room in his basement that I could rent. I moved in the next day. This place when I looked back was a safe, secure and stable place but I did not see it. I was always waiting to be kicked out or maybe this guy would try to touch me inappropriately and I would have to leave in a hurry. Nothing happened and he was a great man and I stayed for a year, and from this time on, I called this guy my father. He was even prepared to adopt me but we didn't get around to doing this. Then I got a girlfriend, got a job and found a small apartment and moved in with that girlfriend. She ended up being the mother of my two children but after about four years she fell apart because she had been abused and could not care for the children. I raised the children for a year but then I fell apart because the pain from my abuse came up. The children went to foster care for a year until their mom came back and took them back in. Two years later, she fell apart again and this time I had been in therapy long enough to be able to care for my children and they came to me. I remained in therapy for a number of years after that but raised my sons until they had grown up.

I would have the odd girlfriend here and there, but nothing worked as my focus was on the children and not the girl friend. One was not nice to my kids so I asked them to leave and another got jealous of my attention to the kids and not her and she left. My children needed me, and I was there for them and just could not or did not know how to split my time up so everyone was happy. I just knew my kids were small and they were the neediest and I was not going to abandon them like I was abandoned. I just could not neglect them to be with someone else who sometimes displayed more neediness than even my children. This was our home and even though I had a great deal of anxiety around losing our housing, we did have a home of sorts. I did not have much support through this but I had purpose. They were lonely years, after the children were fast asleep and I had completed the household chores. I sat sometimes feeling the anxiety, wondering if I would make enough money to pay next month's rent. Going to Social Services as it was called in those days for rent money was a scary process as I was afraid of them somehow, they would somehow conclude that I was not doing a good enough job of raising my kids and take them away. A few times I was forced to get money from them and get health care coverage so my kids could go to the dentist or doctor when needed. Luckily, they did not try to take the kids, even though most of the aid workers seemed very angry and were rude. But still I am grateful they did not take my kids so my purpose would not be taken away. I went to the food bank a lot because they never asked me questions. It was hard parenting alone, especially when I was never parented. I was always kind to my kids, never wanting to cause them to worry or them having to go through something without my support. I had them in sports, which they loved, and I rarely missed a game of theirs. I was on a mission; try my best to build a home for my boys. I did realize that the anxiety was just my feelings from the past coming up and becoming homeless once again was not a reality. I learned that feelings are not facts. However, the feelings were always there, sometimes strong and at other times fleeting. It was still a monkey on my back, even though that monkey is now much smaller and gets even smaller as the years go on. Even now, after twenty-two years in my present relationship and the two of us building a home together, I find that monkey jumps onto my back from time to time. When my wife gets angry, rarely at me but from something in her own life, and that anger from a woman I depend on and love, can trigger me deeply. I am instantly feeling like I am not good enough, feeling like I did something wrong and will be asked to leave or pay for it in some way. It has not happened for a while, but I still have the anxiety.

I have people to talk to; people who will sit and listen to me vent my feelings. I have Counsellors and Doctors that tend to my mental and physical health needs. I have herbalists and nutritionists to help me with my diet. All of these people have helped me to care about my own health, a sense of caring for myself that I lacked in my young life because what I learned from the family was that I was not worth taking care of. My bad feelings are not as intense as in years gone by and the good feelings have grown in

intensity, indicating to me that things are still healing. Yes, I am still healing after forty-three years in recovery. I am so grateful for what I have accomplished and so grateful for the help I have received over the years, grateful for the many wonderful kind people. I would not be as far down this road as I am without so many people supporting me. It shows me through my lived experience how important it is to have supports like these made available for those who want and are ready to change and turn their lives around, to heal from their addictions, mental health issues which lead them into homelessness. It is a big job to turn years of trauma and abuse around and end the learned patterns of self-abuse and self-victimization and then develop skills to cope and live in harmony with others to the best of their ability. This was an overview on how my relationships created and then crashed and burned. This experience is the foundation that I have built my relationship life on, it has become a solid foundation, the bedrock of my lived experience!!

My final summary on how I built a home;

I have spent my whole life working on building a home. First there were the war years of my childhood where I learned all the bad habits of not caring and loving myself and self-medicating with drugs and alcohol to navigate the pain. Then there were the roller coaster early years of my recovery, a lot of which I don't remember as it was so intense with pain. Living without alcohol and drugs to manage my pain, and just to face the pain head on was no easy task. To go cold turkey as people called it and push through with finding the help and supports that was not always made readily available to me. Actually, I had to hunt down some of these supports, demanding to get help. I had to really show these support people how in pain I was in order for them to understand even somewhat, so they would give me the help I needed. It should not be like this. I made it because, as my first counsellor said about me, that I was born with a strong constitution. I had to really persevere, and I had it in me to push. Many that I have known along the way died because they did not have that push inside of them. The supports were not readily available for them to grab as a lifeline. They just slipped through the cracks. My heart is heavy for these people, many who were friends of mine. I don't know if I would have made it on sheer will power and drive, I think not.

The many agencies and support workers, I came across in my recovery were guiding lights in a very dark place, they were there when I fell, when I needed love and when I needed a hand up. I give you this example to show what I mean. I was going through looking at my sexual abuse issues and it was a Saturday morning. My Employment Insurance had not arrived on the usual Friday and there was no food in the house for my kids and myself. I was depressed and did not have anyone to turn to. My doorbell rang and well dressed women handed me an envelope and said this is for Jim. Then she just walked away. I sat at the kitchen table, my kids were still sleeping, and I wondered if this was a letter stating that I was not getting any more Employment Insurance money. After what seemed a long while, I finally opened the envelope and there was \$300.00 dollars' worth of Safeway gift coupons. I started to cry, someone giving and not asking for anything in return. I was shocked and delighted and I whipped over to the Safeway, purchased bags of groceries came home and put the food from this Good Samaritan into my fridge and cupboards. I sat down and a few minutes later my kids came into the room and said, "Dad, were hungry, can we have breakfast" I made them bacon and eggs and toast. They ate and were not aware of the dire situation we had been in a hour earlier. I never found out who had given me this, I had my suspicions but never found out who for sure. Things like these started happening to me and at the most important times and places. All of these people were showing me that I was worth loving and being cared for and that if they cared for me, I should care for me. This was my discovery - recovery period.

Another important part of my healing and creating a home came when I started to see that on a nutritional level, I was not taking care of me. Taking care of me had to be on all levels, Physical, Mental and Spiritual. Nutrition and exercise play a paramount part in healing, especially healing from brain injuries. Lucky for me, I did have a bit of history around good nutrition and taking care of my body. Even

though my family displayed very bizarre behaviors and sometimes extreme right-wing ideologies, they had a great point about nutrition, as I have realized in last number of years. They did not trust Government or Health Authorities for information on nutrition. Even though there was a lot of abuse and family was always angry and violent, they grew most of their own food, Grandma made sure I took Vitamins, I remember the big brown jar of syrupy stuff, a tablespoon every day and we ate well. I ate organic food, even when they did not label it organic.

My family never used chemical fertilizers, the animals and chickens were always free run with no antibiotic additives. This knowledge and leanings left me as I became homeless and drug addicted. But when I got clean and sober, I began to buy Vitamins for myself. I was still lacking in the nutritional department for a few years into recovery, but by my seventh year, when all things crashed for me and I got out counselling. Nutrition began to change to. It was nineteen eighty-four and one day in November, the seventeenth day I remember, I decided to quit smoking. I was smoking four packages of cigarettes a day. I knew that I would have to also quit drinking coffee and soda pops, eating meat, eating chocolate bars and potato chips. All that sugar, salts and bad fats was making me feel down. Like the old saying goes, Bad diet causes depression, and I was very depressed. My doctor put me on anti-depressants, but I felt worse, so decided to go the nutrition route. It was very hard to go cold turkey off all this bad stuff. But intuitively I knew it was the right thing to do and I was determined. I knew I was on a good path. Lot of recovery people were not very supportive, as I see now, they were smoking and eating too much sugar themselves and felt intimidated. A couple of them even said that to me, saying that I would probably go back doing drugs if I didn't watch myself. That just made me more determined to succeed.

To this day, I have not had a cigarette, coffee, chocolate bars to this day, except for the occasional raw dark unsweetened ninety nine percent cacao Chocolate which is good for the body. I have not drunk a soda pop or eaten meat to this day as well, except for deciding to start eating high fat fish. Another thing my family gave me was that they would not allow the school nurse to vaccinate for anything. As a child, I was never sick. They did not allow this community school nurse to give me any Pharma drugs like anti-biotics. If I had an infection or something, which happened rarely they gave me a home remedy, that always tasted horrible but got the job done. Still to this day I don't know what they gave me. All of these have served me well and I have taken alternative medications that my Naturopaths have given me over the years for any of my ailments. Only once in my life I took an antibiotic because I had a severe case of black mold poisoning and was sick in bed for three months. I lost my hearing and I slept most of the time. The long runs of taking antibiotics destroyed my gut biome and caused an over abundant growth of candida, which is a fungus which gave me systemic fungus. I didn't know about this and for a while I relied on conventional, well meaning doctor who were too quick to diagnosis or should I say misdiagnosis me and write me prescriptions for Pharma drugs. None of it worked so I went back to Naturopaths for help. Now things are good again. I guess I got afraid and trusted conventional medicine practitioners. If I break a leg or bone, I will go to a conventional Doctor to reset my bone/s and I know this is a good thing. But for nutrition and diet I will stick with Naturopaths.

Nutrition and diet and supplements have healed my brain fog, memory problems, confusion, depression and gut disorders that I had for so many years, stemming from my brain injuries, living homeless, my consumption of drugs and alcohol and bad diet. I learned that we have to take care of ourselves in all ways, this is the only way to build a home and keep a home. Your relationship with yourself determines what your relationship with others will be like. We all must teach others how to treat us, so it is of utmost importance to lead by example. No one is perfect, especially me, but I do my best to be first kind and loving to myself. I also have another motto and that is, I never give up. I keep looking for a way to resolve. I sometimes have to set an issue aside, learning to live with unresolved problems, not shut the door on them but living along side of them, not letting them scare me.

One last thing I want to talk about here since I am on the topic of healing. I am not going to spend a lot of time on this except to say it is my own belief and maybe no one else finds it helpful but for me without it I would not have made it. It is my own spiritual beliefs that I am referring to. People have many

names for this, but I call it; "My Higher Power" I don't call it God most of the time, I am not religious or read any books about it. Sometimes I call him; "The Great Creator". Not sure exactly what to call it but I know one thing, it is a power greater than me. I have come to rely on this power of the Universe. My old friend from recovery used to tell me in my tuff times that, "The task ahead of us is never greater than the power behind us" This one saying has keep me from crashing and burning and believe me it was close many times. So, I have decided to step out of the debating society and just find something that works for me and I have tried many pairs of boots on to walk down this incredible road. With me the connection to my higher power, I have been able to develop and attitude of gratitude, always looking at what I have to be grateful for and believe you me, there is a lot I am grateful for. I don't judge anyone who believes different than me, live and let live is what I have learned. I am not perfect at this, but I strive for it. As we say in the recovery community; "We claim spiritual progress not perfection". My higher power is also my source of love and often I call him my father, a good father, like I wanted to have, and which strive to be for my children.

Now in the present time, I have a home, I have a community of friends, I have a higher power to lean on when I am not feeling strong. I have many friendly neighbors and Professionals all round me. For many years now they have been my rocks, and this has given me the ability to give back. I have been sharing my story for years in schools with children who either immediately reached out for help from me or I guided to places that could help them. I figure the kids I have helped numbering in the hundred, even thousands that I have shared my story with from schools, Youth Prison, Boys and Girls Clubs and many other youth organizations. What if I had not received help, who would have been there for these young ones to reach out to or who would have been there to inspire them to reach out or some to be inspired to help others as they have reported to me? I always remember this young high school student who was very suicidal. She one day out desperation asked me if I would be her "Father". She had a mother and father at home, but they were too busy to pay attention to her. She was a straight "A" student and had very little confidence in herself. I spoke with her via emails and phone calls and many meets at local Starbucks restaurants, reassuring her that I believe that she could do the things that she was attempting to do. All through University she would phone me in tears, telling me she was sure she failed on an important exam, and I would just say that I believed she did great. She would phone me the next day with the results, saying she receive a mark of ninety four percent, and I would yell, I knew you could do it, I made a big deal of it.

After a few years, she just went and did what she set out to do and the tearful phone calls got less and less. It has been a few years now that she has not called me and from the last few times, we talked I could tell she had done a lot of healing work. I think of her often as an example what it takes for someone to change and heal. I had this kind of support and still do, and I am forever grateful for this and the opportunity to help so many young people. This young woman could have easily ended up homeless and on drugs or even death if she did not have the support of her community. I also have had dozens of students asking me in what ways they could help in their community. It seems that I have become somewhat of an Elder to a lot of students. I have also played an important role in an organization that helps support frontline workers that work and support people like where I came from. Traumatized Homeless people, who are addicted and who suffer from Mental Health issues which then have created barriers for them to live a good life, a good life, not perfect but good like I am now living!

That is the point here; I am now living the good life because of all the supports I received!!

One final note about recovery, a disclaimer of sorts. In the forty-four years I have been working on my self, not all my issues have been worked through. I am not sure I will work through all my issues. Issues brought on by the Trauma from my early life. The list has gotten shorter over the years, but some remain. For transparency I will now list below the four top issues that I am presently aware of and these I so wished they could be resolved. However, I have learned that one can learn to live with unresolved issues and still have a good life!! I always look for the silver linings in the dark clouds of my life.

1. Because of the bullies trying to drown me in the local fast flowing river where I grew up, I never really learned to swim. Water over my waistline brings on great anxiety still. Never got to swim with my kids at the lake or participate in water sports that they did. The silver lining here was that they learned to swim well.
2. Because the bullies snuck up behind me, put their hand over my mouth and nose to see how long it would take for me to pass out from lack of oxygen, when I fought back to try and breath, another bully would sneak around me and punch me hard in my stomach, knocking the air right out of me which took the ability for me to fight back. The effects of this one I have discovered lately, when COVID hit and wearing a mask became mandatory. I put one on and the anxiety in me hit the roof. When someone in public told me to put my mask on or I would not be allowed in their place of business, I panicked. My Doctor wrote a letter that I could show them that I was exempt from wearing a mask. This has worked and I don't go into panic mode. It isn't free from hassles though, as an example, I was in a grocery store buying food and a well-dressed woman came up to me and demanded I put on a mask. When I offered to show her my Doctors letter, she just yelled at me that she didn't care, pulled down her face mask and spit on me. I got rescued by a young store clerk who pushed my buggy to the checkout till and I paid for my food and left. The silver lining is that most shop owners have all been so respectful and kind!
3. If ninety-nine people tell me that I am doing a great job and one gets in my face and criticizes me, I have a struggle to get through the day. The silver lining is that usually it took only one day and not one month like it used to take to work my way through the feelings and back my equilibrium.
4. I always give 110% to the many things I do, just to feel like anyone who only gives 75%, many times feeling not good enough or not as good as everyone else. The silver lining here is I love that I can care so deeply, despite feeling less than.

I end with this poem written by Khalil Gibran from his book, *The Prophet*

“Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be? The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit the very wood that was hollowed with knives? When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight. Some of you say, “Joy is greater than sorrow,” and others say, “Nay, sorrow is the greater.” But I say unto you, they are inseparable. Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed. Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy. Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced. When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.”

— Khalil Gibran,

I love this man's poetry. He explains what I have gone through and makes it possible for me to see the silver linings in life's obstacles.