

WHEN WILL WE GET THERE

Liera Williams

I come from a big family of fourteen. This includes my two younger sisters and three older sisters, my two brothers, my parents, my three little nephews, and, last but not least, my two-year-old niece. My family has had a lot of problems to overcome. We had to do so many things to stay together. So much pain, hurt, and trouble ran through the family. It was too much to handle, too much to go through. It made me want to run away because I couldn't take all of what was going on. We all had our ups and downs, but we still stayed together because everyone was able to put a part in it. We had to know when it was time to be serious, like when another problem came upon us. Even though we all struggled, we all strived to stay in school and my parents tried their hardest to keep working.

Unfortunately my parents had to quit working, so my family was not financially stable. We just started to lose everything, slowly but surely. Since my parents weren't able to make enough money, at one point we had to give up our house and we were homeless. That made me and all of my sisters and brothers very hurt and sad. We felt like our world was coming to an end. We knew then that we really had to work together to survive. We all knew that this was a journey that we didn't want to ever take again. We were actually homeless before about eight years ago. We never thought that we would have to go through that again. At first my mom was just going to make us all move back to Kansas City, but she was not prepared for that, so we went to live with my aunty in the city next to ours. While we stayed with her life was very hard. The neighborhood was very bad out there and my mom was watching over us as much as she could. She was so scared that we would end up doing drugs or something else bad like everyone else out there. We didn't really have that much freedom because my mom made us come in the house really early since things started to pop off as soon as nighttime would hit. People would start shooting, fighting, drinking, and smoking, bringing the police there every single night.

After a while, it was getting too hard because seventeen of us were living in a two-bedroom apartment, including my aunt and her two sons. There was barely anywhere for anyone to sleep, and people came in and out of that house selling weed and just doing it all. I never really felt safe in that environment. I always sat alone in the house with my sister; I felt she was the only person I had. I felt really alone. No one could ever understand me at the time; everyone was too spaced out and caught up in themselves and everything they had to do. I always felt like I was a mouse in a room with a lot of snakes, or like a kid who has to hide under her bed because she is afraid of the dark and no one is around to guide her.

When we weren't able to live with my aunt anymore, we moved into a shelter that was not that satisfying, but it was somewhere to live. It was very small; it had one small room with seven of us living in it. My older sisters and brother did not move there with us; they wanted to go out on their own. I

was so sad after that, because it was bad enough that we had lost our house; now losing my sisters and my older brother made it worse.

I no longer wanted to stay with my parents anymore; I just wanted to run away and find my sisters and bring them back with me. My family just fell apart. We all departed from each other. Everyone argued because we were so tired of being clamped in together. We had to follow the rules of other adults; there was a specific time when we had to eat and leave and come back. It was very hard waking up at seven a.m. and then having to be in your room by nine p.m. I wanted to go crazy, because if I was doing something outside of the shelter, I would have to stop and be back by nine p.m. It was horrible because the people who were managers of the shelter did an inspection every night just to see if everyone was in the room.

As time went on, it was our time to move, and we didn't quite have a place to stay, so we moved to this other shelter that had two bedrooms in it. It had more room than the other place, but still I did not feel like I had all the space I needed. I had a hard time staying focused in school because we had to move so much. The district made us switch schools because we moved out of our original school district. We then moved into this other shelter that was more like transitional housing; we had three rooms and our own kitchen, but we had a limited time to live there. I felt more like I was at home; I still had the feeling of having to move, but I felt more comfortable.

From there, we then moved to Renton. (We had already lived in all the shelters in Tacoma.) I had to get out of my school because I couldn't make it to and from there every day. I really did not want to move to Renton because I didn't know anyone there; Tacoma was where all my friends were. Besides losing my school, I also had to give up going to my church and visiting my sisters as much as I used to. The shelter in Renton let us stay for three to four months. It was very relaxing at times, and I got into a school out there. My sisters came to visit us every two or three weeks.

We then moved to Seattle, where we stayed in a shelter that was very dirty. It was nothing like I planned it to be. It had holes

in the walls and a lot of stains on the floors; we even had rats and little mice. I felt like I could have just lived outside and made a better life. I tried to be away from there as much as I could, so when I got home from school I would always go to the youth center. We could have lived there for three months but my mom was not feeling it, so we stayed there for a little less than a month.

Once again, I was so tired of having to pack up and move. I always tried to make myself believe that this was THE LAST TIME, but it never was. I knew that there was always more to come. We really couldn't find anywhere to go in Seattle so we moved to Kent, where we stayed in a transitional house for three months. I felt pretty safe; there was no fighting or incidents that caused the police to be there every night. It was way better than the environment where my aunty lived. We were going to school in Seattle so we caught a cab to and from school everyday. At first it was kind of embarrassing, but then I realized that it was just another solution to keep me from having to switch schools again.

When our time was up there we then moved back to Seattle where we stayed in another transitional house. My mom told me that we would have our own place after this but I was kind of confused. I didn't know if I should believe her or not! I didn't really know what to believe at that point. I did end up switching schools again, but this time it was by choice, not by force. We lived there for the longest, which was about six months. I thought we were never going to get our own place and that we were going to live in shelters our whole life. Every day before I went to sleep I prayed because I wanted to be like most other families and have my own place. I thought it would make the rest of my family and me happier. Maybe it would bring us closer, maybe it wouldn't, but I really wanted to find out. After the sixth months that we lived there, my mom went out searching for an apartment, and my dad started to work. Whenever they returned home I always asked if there was any luck; none at first, but they had no time to give up yet. We could just feel that something good was coming near.

Before I knew it, my mom said that we got an apartment, but

it was not ready for us to move in yet. I got so happy; no one knew how happy I was and words just couldn't explain. Our time was up at the other place so we moved to this hotel until it was time for us to move to the apartment. We were just trying to do anything to keep our spirits up; we were just happy that we got to move into our own place. We stayed in the hotel for three weeks. It went pretty fast and easy, and I felt happy the whole way through because I knew my problem would be solved in a few weeks.

That third week our apartment was ready for us. We got all settled in and fixed up our house. While being homeless I switched schools seven times in one year. I hope that I am now in a school where I will remain until I graduate next year.

While we were homeless it was very stressful, so I really did not want to attend school, and I just skipped school almost every day so I would not have to be around a lot of people. The other students just really bothered me. They acted like everything was all perfect in their lives and like they didn't need help from anyone. I was getting bad grades in school and failing all of my classes. It kind of makes you feel like you are not wanted anywhere.

This was one of our family's biggest struggles that we've had yet. It was obviously big enough to run my older siblings away. Being so young, I wasn't able to do that so I had to live with it. It was something that I would never want to experience again. It cost way too much, it caused me to fall behind in school, it caused me to lose all of my friends, it caused me to be a very self-centered person who just wanted to be all alone, and it also caused me to lose something very close to me: MY FAMILY.

Everybody that has never been homeless before is so lucky because being homeless is not something that they would want to experience. They should know that what they have as far as living is way better than any environment that I lived in.

Now that we are not homeless anymore, my family is very close to each other. We all have the space that we need and we can give each other privacy. My older brother moved back in with us. My three older sisters come and visit us more often, like every other weekend. Both of my parents have good jobs and

IT'S NOT ALWAYS...

they make enough money to support everyone in the house. All of my younger siblings, including me, attend school on a daily basis and we all get better grades. I am just so happy that we were able to overcome that and now we live peacefully.



*Seventeen-year-old **Liera Williams** hopes to one day become a psychiatrist. As she works toward her goal, she is inspired by God, her parents, and her sisters. She can also be found playing instruments, singing, and dancing.*