

The Peale, Baltimore

Out of the Blocks Storytelling Series

Recorded by Aaron Henkin; Photographs and Music by Wendel Patrick

Produced for the *Out of the Blocks* website, created by the Peale, <https://ootb.thepeale.org/>

Out of the Blocks is supported by PRX and produced with grant funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Cohen Opportunity Fund, The Hoffberger Foundation, Patricia and Mark Joseph, The Shelter Foundation, The Kenneth S Battye Charitable Trust, The Sana and Andy Brooks Family Fund, The Muse Web Foundation, and the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund, creator of the Baker Artist Portfolios



Clayton Williams ([00:02](#)):

Clayton Williams, nickname T. We own 2100 block Edmondson Avenue. I've been around for a long, long, long time.

Speaker 2 ([00:15](#)):

Tell me about your voice. Why it sounds the way it sounds?

Clayton Williams ([00:17](#)):

Yeah. When I was in the fire it scorched my vocal cord.

Speaker 2 ([00:26](#)):

This house fire that you survived, how long ago was that?

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Clayton Williams ([00:29](#)):

Three years ago. I can remember it just like it happened yesterday. But now electricity got cut off, I used to build a fire inside on a grill and I put the charcoal and it would keep me warm and stuff. And so, I guess if fell over when I was asleep. And what woke me up, I can't remember what woke me up. But it was flames, it was flames.

Just couldn't get myself together. The only thing I was worried about was trying to get out because I couldn't remember where the door was. It was just all flames. In Harbor City Burn Unit, they took skin from my legs to cover my hands up. I know they had my hands all bandaged up and I never didn't know my face was scorched. And the first time that I saw myself in the mirror, I didn't realize it. I felt so bad, but God pulled me through. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([01:59](#)):

So this is your home?

Clayton Williams ([02:00](#)):

Yeah, but it belongs to LA. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([02:06](#)):

This is a van, Ford FreeStar van, huh?

Clayton Williams ([02:09](#)):

Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 2 ([02:11](#)):

How long you've been staying in here?

Clayton Williams ([02:12](#)):

About a year or so.

Speaker 2 ([02:16](#)):

So this van is in the lot of the auto repair shop here.

Clayton Williams ([02:20](#)):

Yeah, Auto Service, yeah.

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Speaker 2 ([02:21](#)):

So tell me about how you worked it out with LA to be able to be in here.

Clayton Williams ([02:25](#)):

Yeah. Well, I can as long as I want. As long as nobody's stealing from them.

Speaker 2 ([02:35](#)):

So you...

Clayton Williams ([02:36](#)):

Like a nightwatchman.

Speaker 2 ([02:39](#)):

You're like a nightwatchman who happens to live here, in this van at night?

Clayton Williams ([02:43](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([02:46](#)):

Tell me about how you stay warm in winter in here.

Clayton Williams ([02:50](#)):

See all these blankets, these quilts and stuff. Keeps me warm. I got enough stuff that keeps me warm.

Speaker 2 ([03:02](#)):

And you've been in here for you say about a year, huh?

Clayton Williams ([03:04](#)):

Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 2 ([03:08](#)):

You were born to survive.

Clayton Williams ([03:10](#)):

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Yeah. Yeah. I think so. The way, as long as... I'm 65 now, so I've been surviving for a mighty long time.