

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/>



William (00:00):

William Thomas, 1118 Ward Street, Baltimore, Maryland, 21230. Paul's Race has been in operation 35 years. I run the ambassador volunteer program. My name is William.

Crowd (00:15):

Hey, William.

William (00:17):

I'm 6'9, 250lbs. I'm a country boy. And, I feel like I have been given a second chance of life.

William (00:27):

Usually when you go to rehab and you started having a relapse, usually you start sneaking around, and you start to dip and dab. And that, usually means that you, you start the process of relapse, and you

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start sneaking around copping, again. And then, you're fooling yourself because you think, you can just do one, but if you're like me, or like a lot of us, one is too many.

Speaker 2 (00:54):

[inaudible 00:00:54] A thousand is never enough.

William (00:56):

Thousand is never enough.

William (00:58):

Can remember pretty clearly. It was August 1986. And, at that point I was, I was a marijuana smoker, I was a drinker. I seemed to always be able to function. I had a job which, wasn't bad, and I had graduated college smoking every day, drinking. At this point, my wife was already smoking crack. I saw some changes that was in her. One day I asked her, I want to experience what she was experiencing. I want to know what was making her go through all these changes, and never wanted anything else after that. I didn't want no more luckie, no more marijuana. I didn't want anything else to crack from that point on. It was calling me, the obsession was always there.

Aaron Henkin (01:47):

What is it about that high, that's so different from anything else?

William (01:55):

I don't know. It was, a totally different experience than I ever had before in my life. It was, everything got quiet, or get quiet. It was, it's hard to even describe. I could sit, feel the bells ringing, in my head from time to time. And, I haven't got high over 23 years. You can't say no to yourself. Even though you know, what you're doing is ruining your life. You just can't say no to it. And, it got to the point where, I just gave up on trying to even say no, and just said yes, to all the stuff that was calling me.

William (02:41):

Well, it was a payday, and it was two weeks from Christmas. And, the kids just went through traumatic experience, being in foster care for that period of time. I really wanted to give the kids a real good Christmas. And, my whole plan was to come up to Baltimore. I was living in Bowie at the time. And, then I had to catch a train up to Baltimore, catch the bus, catch the subway, catch the bus to go to my wife's house. By the time, I got off the subway, I was up Mount Vernon. And, the call of, you can do one, it's not going to hurt anything. This, that call, of get one, came out of nowhere. And, I was so close to Park Heights, which where, I always got high at. I went to Park Heights, I'd say with all the intentions of just doing one.

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William (03:39):

And I went up there, and I spent all the money up. It took me a couple of days. I spent all the money up, and by the time I got done, I called my wife up. And, cause I had no money, and I was living at Bowie, I couldn't get home. And she told me, that I could come by, and she would feed me, and she would give me a chance to take a shower, and see the kids. But when I got there, and she had, at this time, over 90 days clean, and I came in, and she had some food for me, and the kids was happy to see me. But, she was on the phone. And, I remember her being on the phone, I guess she was talking to her sponsor or some of her new, NA friends.

William (04:21):

Basically, they told her that, don't have me in there. She needed to send me out. I guess, looking at me, I guess, brought on some feelings about getting high herself. So they told her to get rid of me. So, in the midst of seeing the kids, she put me out and that was, the last time I saw my kids for like 15 months. So, last time I saw my kids was 15 months later. I was a big hurting feeling, being honest about it. But I just couldn't do it no more. I just couldn't do it. I thought, I'd be better off just being homeless. I try to sleep. I thought being homeless, would be easy. And I remember, my first experience of doing it. I tried to be on this bench, on a look over the park where the Zoo at, at Druid Hill Park.

William (05:10):

And that was a rough experience, of rough night. And I knew, that wasn't something, I could do. That's why, I started the shelter, living in a shelter. So, thank God, for them. That's where, I met some people who directed me in the place to get some help. For me, I was blind, and now I can see. I didn't see all this beauty that was around us. I got clean in March, 30 days later, I could see the blooms, that I was hoping for. I was hearing the birds, that I haven't heard in a while. I called my wife up. And, at this time it was, say 15 months since the last time we spoke or saw each other. And, she was still clean. And we knew over the phone that, both of our lives have changed.

William (05:55):

I guess she never really heard my voice sober. I never heard hers sober, it was like magical over the phone. We knew, that our lives have changed. And the kids, to see the kids again. And, it's just a magical moment. I could sit through it today, cause they see it. And at that time the kids, are almost seven, five and three. People know me, that's when all I could talk about was my kids. And I'm very close with them right now, I have a grandson. Excuse me for a moment. I love my family. And, I guess looking back, the biggest blessing for me is my family. Being where I supposed to be at, being in their lives, and try to give them the spiritual principles. And try to give them, give it to them now, or give it to him when they were young. And hopefully, they wouldn't make the mistakes I made.

William (06:58):

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All right, we can move on. Part of the tradition of this group is, if you are a brand new.

Crowd (07:03):

Brand new.

William (07:04):

Thank you. And volunteer, for the first time we ask that you stand up, introduce yourself, tell us all about yourself.

Crowd (07:12):

In 10 seconds or less.

Speaker 4 (07:12):

No more.

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