

Going Home

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It was the first week of December. I remember walking from the YMCA through thick, cold snow to my house fifteen minutes away, on the east side of Brockton. I could not wait to get home, take my shoes off, and heat up my frostbitten toes. I started to think about my nice, cozy bed and a hot plate of dinner waiting for me. As soon as I caught a glimpse of my little apartment lights up on the second floor, I could not help but grow excited. I started to sprint toward my house; I practically ran right into my mother as I burst through the front door.

She was bent over the living room coffee table and crying frantically. I immediately stopped and asked her why she was crying, but she merely dried her eyes with her shirt and told me, "Nothing is wrong," as she feigned preoccupation cleaning the living room table. I ran into my room and asked my older brother, Andre, what was wrong with mom. Andre told me that we were getting evicted from our home.

I grew so overwhelmed with anger towards my mom, my dad, and the rest of the world, that I could not express any emotion at all. This was not the first time we had gotten evicted; I thought to myself, "Damn! We are going to have to live with a relative again." I could not deal with the thought of packing up and completely changing my lifestyle again, especially since I had just finally settled into this house. After being paralyzed with anger and guessing where we were going to stay, I went into my mother's room and happened to walk in while she was on the phone with our landlord, Jill. She pleaded with her to let us stay at least until Christmas. I guess Jill agreed because the conversation ended with my mom expressing tremendous gratitude. That night, my brothers argued about which relatives they thought we were going to stay with. I just laid there dreading the thought of changing schools and having to leave my friends again. They

argued for twenty minutes until Andre came in the room and threatened them with the words, “Shut up or die.” We all sat in our room in silence, just thinking about what the next couple of weeks had in store for us.

It turns out that we weren't going to live with any of our relatives. Uncle Jim and Aunt Diane said their apartments were too small, and Aunt Dawn flat-out said, “No.” For weeks my mom and dad searched madly for an apartment, but no one responded. My dad worked two jobs with overtime in order to afford at least a three-bedroom apartment. He worked so much at that time that he was never home.

When Christmas Day arrived, my brothers and I woke up at one o'clock in the afternoon; Christmas was nowhere to be found in our house. We had presents wrapped under the tree, but they all were the same hand-me-down, charity gifts we received every year. The only thing on our minds was where we were going to live in two or three days. Then mom came into the living room and glowing with happiness yelled, “We might have an apartment!” Our eyes lit up and we all started asking questions at once.

Tony yelled, “Where is it?”

I asked, “Are we still living in Brockton?”

Andre asked, “Will I have my own room?”

My mom said, “Do y'all want to go see it?”

We all screamed, “Yeah!”

My cousin Henry drove us to a housing complex on the west side of Brockton. It was beautiful. As we drove through the complex, I saw a bunch of little kids having a snow ball fight and laughing. This image almost brought me to tears. Although I felt no desire to join them, just seeing kids laughing and having fun sparked an emotion that I had not felt in long time:

happiness. All of the buildings looked exactly the same; they all were moderately large, red brick buildings with roofs covered in thick layers of snow. Inside the apartment, I distinctly recall the pine scent of the shiny, freshly polished wooden floors. The apartment was twice the size of our current home and had four rooms. I was so excited to tell my friends about my new home and even more excited about not having to worry about where I was going to live. I asked my mom when we were going to move in, and she smiled and told me, "Next week."

The first five days after Christmas were the happiest I have seen my mom in years. She sang while she packed up all of our clothes, and every time one of us would pass her, she would give us a kiss on our cheeks or foreheads and tell us that she loved us. Those were probably the only days that my mom went without screaming at one of my brothers. I was happy, too. I had already told my friends about the move, and planned to have them help us and spend a night after we got settled. That week was the first time in many weeks that I did all of my homework and was actually staying awake in school. I felt like nothing could bring us down from our high, until my mom received a phone call from our new landlord, who said that we were denied the apartment because my brother Andre was 20 years old and could not live with us. Before my mom had a chance to lie and say that Andre was not going to stay with us, the landlord told my mom that he had already given the apartment to another family. That news brought her right back to where she was a month ago, and, for the first time in a long time, I lost my composure and started to cry as well.

My mother murmured, "That fucking Jill telling my business. She doesn't want us to have anywhere to stay."

I couldn't imagine what else we could do. We had to be out of our apartment in two days because Jill wouldn't let us stay a minute longer in her house. I went to school the next day like a

zombie; I was dazed and unfocused and paid little attention to my friends or anyone else. I went to what was now only Jill's house and cried myself to sleep. Then I woke up and repeated my cycle in school the next day, but did not go to back to Jill's house.

Instead, I met my mom at the bus terminal. She told me in a strong and liberated tone, “We are not living in Jill's apartment anymore, and we are not staying with Aunt Diane or any of them either. We are going to do this on our own.” Her optimism started to lift my spirits. I started to think we could actually do it. She went on to say, “Now, Dad is going to rent out a room and Andre is going to stay with his girlfriend Amanda.”

All my hopes dropped. “Dad and Andre aren't coming with us?”

Mom replied, “It is just going to be you, me, and your brothers for a while.”

I know she saw hurt in my face because her tone immediately dropped from being loud and assertive to soft and helpless. “Now, I can't do this by myself. I need you to help me take care of Tony, Justin, and Derrick's crazy behinds. I'm going to need you to be strong with me and help your brothers get through this.”

The thought of not having my older brother or my dad made me burst into tears. I wasn't used to being the oldest. Even though I was younger than Derrick, I knew I was going to be the one who would have to step up and take charge. After a couple of seconds, I sucked my tears back in and put on a facade. I knew my mom needed me to be strong; I told her, “I'll try.” She smiled and took me to our new home: David Jon Louison Family Shelter.