A: So, we'll just start by if you could just say your name and a little bit about yourself

C: Yeah, my name is Chad Wistman, 51. Uh, going to be 52 next week! So, let's see. Where should I start? I guess I could start with my childhood growing up, which won't take too long. My parents separated when I was 3. From then, they always remained friends I would ???? with my mother for a time, with my father another time, kind of back and forth throughout the years and there was no arguments or fighting or anything. However, my life growing up with my father was a very, very challenging-- Reason being, my father was a parole officer for 28 years. Then he became the director of the DOC, Department of Corrections. So, my life growing up as a child was very, very structured. So, moving on past that, I can get into the reason why I'm here at a homeless camp. I've been gainfully employed since I was 17. I have two kids, two exes. During the time of having children, I maintained everything: took care of the bills, paid for the food. The mother, she didn't want to work; she stayed home. That's fine. It became challenging, so the first relationship didn't work out. I moved on to the next one, with another child.

A: I'm so sorry to interrupt. Is this in Denver?

C: Yes.

A: Okay. So you grew up in Denver, born in Denver?

C: Born, raised in Den-- well, kind of all over, but I was born and most of my time here in Denver.

A: Okay, sorry. Go on.

C: So, after the second child, and the second relationship, which obviously didn't work out, I moved on. I got custody of both of my children, and I maintained, and always made sure I made it to work and took care of what you need to do to be a parent. You know? That's basically how it went for a long time.

A: Can I ask what you did for work?

C: Yeah! At first, I was a mechanic. I started at Grease Monkey. I was there 15 years and ended up being the manager there. Then we ended up getting rid of the name, "Grease Monkey" and went to Perry and Sons Automotive, so that way we could do work, you know, not just oil changes and basic service. We did major work. And, it was good. I made a lot of money. Took care of my children, took care of everything. Well, then my mother passed away, at 58, and I started drinking real bad. So, with that being said, I ended up getting DUIs. Lost my license, and I continued to drive, like an idiot. So, I got a DUI and then a month later I got another one, which in the court system, that's "aggravated." So, long story short, I ended up, the judge gave me six years in prison for 2 DUIs back-to-back and a habitual traffic offender, which back in that day, they were really, really serious about it. They didn't want you to drive, uh to get a DUI, and then a month later to get another one? The judge was pissed.

A: And this was the '90s?

C: Yeah, yeah. So, I got sentenced to six years in prison. And I basically lost my children. My son ended up going back to his mother which, she was into drugs. That's one of the reasons why I got custody. But, somehow, some way, she got him back. And I ended up going to prison, so. After that, I just let things ride and did what I had to do-- halfway houses, classes,

A: Did you do the full six years?

C: On the six years, you get good time, I did three years out of six. And then from there I went to a halfway house, where I did another year. Working, saving money, you know, again, doing what I'm supposed to do. When I completed the program, I walked out of there with almost 7,000 in savings and I had already gotten an apartment. So, I'm back on the street again. However, I'm on parole. So, still, you gotta watch your ass. There's a lot of demons out there, there's a lot of bullshit out there, you know, you gotta stay away from that shit.

A: Can you explain what you mean by "demons"?

C: Well, like drugs. Alcohol. I never really got into the big drugs, like heroine, cocaine, and. I mean, I never did heroine, but I did cocaine. I've tried methamphetamines. They're both horrible. Any advice [*chuckles*] to anybody out there: stay away from that shit.

A: Do you want to explain a little bit?

C: Not really.

A: Okay, that's fair.

C: Not really, it's pretty self-explanatory. You get hooked on cocaine or methamphetamines, you're gonna be hooked for a while. Until you either hit rock bottom or you go to jail. One of the two. So, I basically hit rock bottom. From there, I got out of that game and got back to my feet. Luckily, I didn't you know, with the parole situation, I finished with a year of parole, so. All in all, with good time I did, with the halfway house, the prison time, and being on parole, they got five years outta me.

A: Wow. And being on parole, were you living on the streets, or where-- you had an apartment, you said

C: Yeah, I was in Colorado Springs. I relocated to get away, as the say, from the playmates and playpen, here in Denver. I had to get outta Denver. I spent a lot of time in the Springs, so I knew it well, and that's where I relocated. It was great, it was beautiful. So, from there I basically moved back to Denver after a while and moved in with my cousin Rodger who was a Vietnam vet. Um, maintain work from being a mechanic then I went to, I've done concrete, I've done framing houses, I know how to read blueprints; I've done maintenance, I've done plumbing, I've done electrical, landscaping, all the basic needs that people need. And, I was never without work. So, I moved in with my cousin Rodger, which was my Aunt \_\_\_\_'s house, and we inherited it when they passed away. So, I stayed with Cousin Rodger for 15 years.

A: Wow, in Denver

C: Yeah, in Denver. And, I took care of him-- I was his primary caretaker, in the home

A: What kind of care did he need?

C: Uh, he has PTSD, bad. He's a Viet Nam Vet and he was so screwed up when he got back from Viet Nam that he, literally he didn't talk-- he didn't talk-- hardly at all for about 11 years. He secluded himself in the back room of the house. So. This was before I ever moved in, when his mom and his dad was still alive. When they passed away, long story short, I came back from Colorado Springs, and my dad said, "why don't you just move in with Rodger because you're part of the house, too?" And I said, "that'd be great." So, I moved in and got a new job. I started working for National Coatings, painting.

A: Oh, cool.

C: Yeah, it was really cool! From there, I continued to work and continued to do everything. And then, Covid hit and everything went to shit. Unemployed, started drinking again...

A: Mm-hm. Was this immediately, March 2020, or April, like about when did you become unemployed?

C: I can't remember the month, I really can't. It was when Covid first started and everybody was freaking out. Everybody was, you know, quarantining themselves. It was really kind of scary. You know? Advice to anybody out there: get your shots. I got mine. You know, 'cause there's been hundreds and hundreds of thousands of deaths over this stuff. So, back to my story. After that hit, I struggled to get unemployment, and the stimulus check, and (stutters) I got one stimulus check and one unemployement check and I haven't gotten anything since. Because everything got so out of whack. As we all now. So, anyway, back to-- I just started drinking again. No drugs! However, I do smoke marijuana. I encourage everyone to smoke marijuana. (Laughs) It will calm you down, and will, you know, I don't care if you sit on the couch eating potatoes. Chips.

A: Right. Or potatoes, whatever (laughs)

C: Yeah, or potatoes. Who cares! Whatever you're craving. But anyway, I just got into a real bad depression. As the Covid moved on, and the days, and the months, and everything moved on, I ended up, you know, I started pawning things, like tools, just to get the alcohol. I- I'm an alcoholic. I struggled with it for a *long*time. And, eventually, it, uh, you know, I hit rock bottom on *that*! Well, about five, six, months ago, my father passed away due to Alzheimer's; prostate cancer came back, and dementia. And it literally seemed like it happened overnight. So, then I went into even *more*of a depression. I didn't know what to do and I had a so-called friend who needed a place because he had gotten evicted. And, I've known him for a long time. since high school. I don't wanna give any names out on that because I'm literally going to court over it to try to get my house back. So, I let him move in. Long story short, things went south. I told him if he didn't move out, start moving his crap out today, we were gonna have a problem. Well, he got scared and he called the police. And he has Parkinson's; he can't talk. He can barely walk. And again, I've known him since high school. I was trying to help him out. Well, he called the cops and said I beat him up. Said I put a gun to his head. I don't even own a gun. I'm a *felon*. I *can't*own a gun. You *will*go back to prison if you are caught with a gun and you're a felon. So, I've never even owned a pistol, just rifles, 'cause I like to hunt. But, again, he made these accusations, and no questions asked, they showed up: full force, assault rifles, nine millimeters. I'm down in the basement, calming down, because I'd just screamed at him and told him he needed to start packing today or we're gonna have a problem.

A: Right, and you had no idea he'd called?

C: I had no idea. So, they screamed at me at the top of the stairs. I go to the bottom of the stairs. I got three officers, one with an assault rifle and two with nine millimeters, both pointed at me. I thought they were gonna shoot me. I immediately put my hands up, went upstairs; they handcuffed me, they arrested me, and they started to haul me out. And there was the guy I was trying to help, out there texting the police because he can't talk. So, I ended up going to jail for six weeks before I could get out. I get out, and there's a protection order and he's still in my house. He gained residency, you know with mail, he ended up moving all of his crap in my garage.

A: This is the house you inherited?

C: Yeah, the house my aunt and my uncle-- where Rodger and I stayed.

A: And was your cousin Rodger still there?

C: No. Rodger, when my dad passed away-- I was gonna get there soon-- he had a mental breakdown and I had to take him to the VA hospital, where he underwent 40 shock therapy treatments. He was there about three or four months. That's when I let this guy move in and tried to help him out. It was only supposed to be temporary, for like a *month*. Anyway, back to the story.  He calls the cops, I get arrested, I go to jail. I get out, there's a protection order. I can't even go to my own house. So, all my family's pretty much gone. Rodger's the only one I really have left, and now he's still at the VA hospital. I can't go home. My stepmother, my dad's wife, who I wouldn't life with her if you paid me a million dollars, that's how much of a *bitch*she is! I can't stand her. And, so, I'm like, where am I gonna go? You know? I ended up staying in my car for a while. And, that didn't work out, because, as I said, I had no money. I was literally-- whatever resources I could do to get dog food, because I have a dog. I was just, I was flippin' out. And then my insurance dried out. I get pulled over. For speeding. And, um, no insurance, this day and age, you don't have insurance, they're gonna tow the car. And that's exactly what they did. They told me to grab whatever you can grab. I got a ticket for it, and they towed the car. So there goes my car. Me and my daughter, standing in the street. (chuckles)

A: Do you remember where that was?

C: It was in Denver. It was off of 72nd and Pecos. Yeah, I grew up there. I graduated high school in Westminister.

A: But that's where they left you when they towed your car?

C: Yeah! Yeah, I was comin' down Pecos. And it's 35 and I was doin' 45. Ten over. And, it's like, really? And, people are goin' by me, doin' 50 and stuff, and *I* was the one that happened to get caught.

A: Did you tell them that you were living in your car?

C: Yeah! They didn't care. They said, "you don't have insurance," and um, that's, that's what they did. They towed it-- "you can get it out of the pound, but you need to get insurance." Well, I had no money! I ran out of money, and I'm broke, and now I don't have a place to go. And I can't get my car out. So, I lost my car. So. I'm calling my stepmother, that when my dad remarried, she had major issues going on: just lost two family members herself, had a house full of people. I couldn't go stay with her. However, she did help me out a *little*bit financially. So, this is where I'm at. It can happen to anybody. I had nowhere to go. I called my buddy, Mike. He was staying in *his*car, and we ended up-- Well, back to when I got arrested and got out. They gave me a civil assist, where I could have officers take me to the house so I could grab whatever I can grab. Now, this is the fucked up part: they gave me 10 minutes. *Ten minutes,* to get whatever I could get, and get out, because the guy was still upstairs. The whole, entire upstairs was completely trashed. They had went through my bedroom, stole all kinds of stuff. I probably had over 100 dollars in just change, gone. And I'm just like, (stutters), and the cops-- I got two of 'em downstairs, two of 'em upstairs, and the lady cop says, "listen, you got seven minutes." I mean, they're literally timing me. And my room was tore apart. So I'm grabbing everything I can grab in my big duffle bag. Two duffle bags. And my insulin, 'cause I have Type-2 Diabetes, And, I'm freakin' out, you know. I grabbed what dog food I could grab, and down to two minutes, she says, "listen you got two minutes." And I'm like, "are you fucking serious?" These people have ransacked my house, because apparently, he had two different people move in downstairs. A girl and her husband. In *my*house! I'm livid. I mean, completely livid. I'm ready to do something stupid! (laughs) However, got my brain together, 'cause that's not the answer. So, I grabbed what I could grab, and I went over to an old lady's house, that I had been working for in the neighborhood doing landscaping, cutting grass. And her name is Sandra. I call her Grandma Sandra. She's 86 years old. She's got more spunk than any 86-year-old I ever met. She goes to the gym three times a day. Anyway, she said, "I'll let you stay a few nights. You and the dog." But, when her daughters caught ear that I was staying there, they kind of controlled things. They were like, "this isn't gonna work out." So again, back. I called my buddy Mike and we end up going-- I have my stepmother drop me off at his car with my stuff. And we decide, well, she bought me a tent. I said, fuck it! We'll just pitch a tent in a park, or wherever we can. I mean, there's a lot of homeless people out there, in the area that I'm at. There's a lot of homeless people. And it's unfortunate, because, whether you do drugs or not, that's your choice. But I don't do drugs. I've been, again, worked all my life. And all this shit happened within a couple of months. So, we got behind this food bank, and apparently somebody called the police. Here we go again. With the fucking cops. Can't stand 'em. Anyway, the lady that ran the place, she ended up showing up. We were getting a ticket for trespassing, until she realized. She looked at us, saw my dog, and said, "okay. You guys can go ahead and pitch your tent back here, you know, until we figure something out." She actually wanted to help. And, she did! We stayed there for two more nights. I ended up getting, because we were panhandling-- never in my life have I asked anybody for money-- I've *given*homeless people money, right out of my car. If I've got a couple extra bucks, and they got a sign, here you go. I don't care if you drink, but you should *eat*. (chuckles) You know, it's your choice. So, we're panhandling, and it's just degrading. It's embarrassing. And again, this shit can happen to anybody. You know? So the lady comes back, well she tells the cop, "rip that ticket up." I was like, thank God! (laughs) I already dealt with so much crap, so much bullshit, I don't wanna deal with it no more! I just wanna go about my business! And you know, a word to the wise: be kind to people! Don't judge. Don't be racist, you know. It's not just Black lives matter, it's all lives matter. *All*lives matter. Period. So, she comes to us-- oh, anyway, back (stutters). Panhandling and drinking. I ended up getting so sick. Going through withdrawals. My blood sugar was through the roof. And then, all of a sudden, I could hardly *breathe*. I mean, I was puking. I puked *all*day Sunday, all night Sunday night, all Monday morning. And then it hit me: I was having trouble breathing. I thought I was gonna have a heart attack. Or a stroke. Or a diabetic seizure. So, I told my buddy Mike, "call 9-11, dude. Something's wrong." So they came, they got me, and sure enough, I was in bad shape. I was going through withdrawals. I was-- I couldn't think straight. My blood sugar was almost 600. If anybody knows about diabetes, that is *way*too high, to where you could go into a diabetic seizure, which could lead to a coma, which could lead to death.

A: Where should your blood sugar be?

C: Your blood sugar should be between 90 and 140. That is the norm. And I take insulin, I take medication, and I usually keep it up. But, I was so under depression, and drinking so much Rock Gut vodka, that it made me so sick that I ended up in the hospital. When the doctor told me that, "you could have had a diabetic seizure, coma, and possible death," that scared the shit out of me. And at the time, Michael had my dog, and he was still at the food bank, behind the food bank. But before, when I was *getting*sick, the lady showed up. Told the cop to rip up the ticket, and she said, "I got you guys a place." She's an advocate, of whatever.

A: Well, she works at a food bank.

C: Yeah! So, she found this campsite. Well, it's not a campsite, it at the Park Hill Church. For homeless people. And there's a bunch of tents, there's a staff, and I mean, for whatever it's worth, they treat you golden. I mean, all they want you to do is get back on your feet. So, back to my story. It's like, I can't even believe all this shit is happening. I mean, going from being gainfully employed, to having custody of my children, and then prison time, getting out, back on your feet, and then losing, and going through this crap with my house: it's overwhelming!

A: All in one year

C: All within a year. And it's like, again, it can happen to anybody. I don't give a fuck if you're rich, poor, smart, stupid, black, white, brown, it doesn't matter. It can happen to anyone. So, just a word to the wise, to the people out there.

A: And how long have you been here?

C: I'm goin' on two weeks. Yeah, we've been sleeping in parks until, you know. And, they say everything happens for a reason. When that lady said to rip up that ticket, and she was gonna help, I knew she would. And she knew I went to the hospital. She was very, very concerned. She even contacted me at the hospital. And I said, "yeah, have you got the place for us?" So, I get out of the hospital, and I get the address, and the hospital gives me a bus ticket, and off I go.

A: To here, to SOS

C: To here!

A: Is your friend Mike here, too?

C: Well, that's a whole 'nother story. He's like my brother. We've known each other since nine years old, and he's two years older than me. I grew up with him and his family. Best friends. Him and his two little brothers, one of my best friends. Anyway, Mike went through the same situation. Mike's been an alcoholic, bad, bad. I mean, way worse than I was, for a *very*long time. Well, yeah. He got here, he got the tent, he got everything set up. I got out of the hospital, and then I found the place. I told the bus driver, what's the address, where I needed to go, and gave 'em directions. Took two busses, and I got here. So I got here; they were expecting me, they knew my name, I had my tent, you know. And it's not just a tent, it's like an igloo.

A: Can you explain that more:

C: It's, I mean, it's not huge, but it fits two big nice cots. They give us electricity. We got fans, we got lights. I mean, gave me brand new sleeping bags, pillows. I mean, the hospitality is just unreal. It really is.

A: I feel like starting from that moment, when they knew you were coming--

C: Yeah! They knew I was coming, 'cause they expected two people. Then Michael said, "hey, Chad's in the hospital. He went through a bad withdrawal, and his blood sugar went through the roof, and he was gonna have some real bad complications if he didn't go to the hospital." So, I got out, and I decided when I got here, and Michael was still drinking, still going down panhandling, and I refused to go. I decided, I'm done. I quit drinking. I haven't had a drop since that last Saturday. Two weeks ago. I don't want to go back to it, 'cause life's too short. It really is. So, it's overwhelming, because today's my father's funeral, amongst other things. The 18th of August. And I can't attend because it's in Lafayette, and I have no transportation; I have no money. So, that's been a real hard one for me to deal with. However, when I get things goin again, I'm just gonna go up there by myself, you know.

A: Yeah, and just pay your respects in your own way

C: Pay my respects, and I'll continue to do it, for as long as I live. I'll always go visit. Especially on Memorial Day. My dad was a military man, too. Anyway, that's where I'm at! I'm at this homeless shelter. I just can't believe it; this is something I've never been through. From being where I was at to now, is overwhelming. It is. It would make you wanna go drink or get high, or just not care. Well, I have to care. I wanna get out of here. There's people that's been here for a year. You know, I couldn't live here for a year. Even though we get as much food as we need, there's plenty to drink, plenty of water, plenty of hospitality, plenty of caring, they wanna help.

A: Why couldn't you live here for a year?

C: 'Cause I don't wanna live in a tent when it's below zero. (laughs) I'm used to a house! A cup of coffee and a TV. Fuck, I can't even watch TV, there's not a TV here.

A: I'd actually be curious, how do you, since I'm thinking you've lived in your car, you've lived in tents on the street, you've lived in tents here. How do you define, "homeless"?

C: Just like that-- you lose everything, you hit rock bottom, you go to drugs or alcohol, you don't care about yourself, let alone anybody else. And you drown your sorrows in whatever chemical you wanna use. Doesn't matter what it is. Alcohol, cocaine, methamphetamines, pills... And that's another big one! Kids fucking around with these pills! Stupid! The fentanyl pills, the oxy, it's everywhere. There's a big pill epidemic, there's a big heroine epidemic. I mean, everything! Methamphetamines, it's crazy.  It really is. I didn't grow up like this. And to watch it from the outside, it's just appalling. It's like wow, really?

A: This might seem like a really stupid question, so apologies, but earlier when you said there's demons out there, and you mean drugs and alcohol-- can you describe what that's really like? Like, say you leave the SOS site, and you're walking around, how do those demons appear?

C: Well, the demon is the addiction. And when you're addicted to a certain chemical, drug, whatever you want to call it, it becomes a *demon*. Inside of you, to where that demon is telling you, "you need to go get this. You need a fix. You need to go get a shot," or whatever the case may be. That's the demon, it's the addiction in you. And the demons are-- the demon *has*demons! It's like, it could be heroine, it could be meth, it could be coke, I mean, whatever it is. The demon has his little helpers.

A: Wow, "the demon has demons," yeah. So, meaning that if you're looking for one thing, but something else comes up, you'll take it?

C: Yeah! I mean, if you have to substitute one drug for another, 'cause that's all you can get ahold of to get high, and to try to forget what's going on in your life, and what you need to do, then you're gonna take it. Seriously! They don't care. If they can't get a hit of heroine, they'll get some pills! You know, I've seen it. Heard about it. It's sad. It really is, you know? Get off your ass, and you've got to try. You can't give up. You seriously can't give up.

A: Can you describe a little bit what not giving up looks like?

C: Yeah, you've gotta work for what you want. Period. And, I know it's hard, because of the Covid, and unemployment. I mean, things are starting to get back, and jobs are coming up. Yeah, it's coming back, but not quick enough, right?

A: So, as you've been here two weeks, what is a kind of typical day like for you here?

C: It sucks! Because, you know, money-- and I have bus passes and whatnot, but, it took me a week to recover from being in the hospital. I mean, I had to get my energy back, I had to start eating again-- I didn't eat for two weeks. You know, I mean, we ate what we could get from the food bank, but, we'd rather drink than eat. That's what happens! When stuff like this goes wrong, and you've got a chemical dependency, it becomes a demon inside of you, and that's what you want, to forget whatever you need to forget to numb the pain, I guess. Again, it could happen to anybody. So, I'm gonna sign-off for now, and hope that Regis, or wherever it goes, maybe it'll help somebody out to understand that, look: you know, you could be starting out homeless as a child, which sucks, or you could become homeless instantly. And here I am, in a homeless camp, and it's like, I'm like, "really?"

A: Before you sign off, would you be comfortable talking about your dog a little bit?

C: Ah, my dog, Dozer!

A: Yeah, 'cause Dozer's here with us right now.

C: Dozer's here with us, right now. He's a tuxedo lab with a little collie mix. Believe it or not, he's a retired search and rescue dog. He is 16 years old. In 2013, when the Lyons flood took the town out, we volunteered for the Salvation Army, and he literally found 11 people, buried. No joke. Yeah. So, he's a hero. And he's my best friend; I've had him 13 years. I got him when he was three years old.

A: So he's been with you through all of this

C: He's been with me through everything. I won't leave his side, and he won't leave my side, and that's just the way it is. If you can't accept my dog, then you can't accept me. You know, he's my best friend, and he's also therapeutic. When you get down and out, and he knows that you're upset, he'll come up to you, and nudge you and say, "Give me some love! Dad! Give me some love!" (*laughs*) So, that's Dozer for ya. He's getting old, and the life expectancy of a black lab is about 16 years. But, he's still strong and he's still doin' good, so I'm not gonna go there on that one.

A: You take good care of each other.

C: Yeah! So, I'm gonna sign off for now. Hope it helps somebody out, and everybody-- be kind to each other. Don't judge.

A: Thank you.

C: Have a good day.