

DATE: 5/21/09
SOURCE: CBS News
HEADLINE: Losing Homes and Ending Childhoods



Losing Homes And Ending Childhoods

CBS Reports: Economic Meltdown Leaves Homeless Children To Grow Up Fast

By Byron Pitts



Tristen Clark, a homeless 11 year old, at school. (CBS)

(CBS) UPDATE, May 29: Since this story aired, Gus Hernandez's father found a job. And many viewers wrote in about Tristen Clarke, including Herb Smith of North Carolina who said, "I'm fortunate to live on Social Security and a pension." Smith enclosed \$100 for Tristen and his mom.

Meet 11-year old Tristen Clarke, and his mother Rhonda.

If you want to understand what it means to be a homeless child in this recession, walk a day in Tristen's size 7 sneakers.

"How is life for you?" asked CBS News correspondent Byron Pitts.

"Pretty bad," Tristen said. "Everything has gone down the drain. We don't have enough money to pay, we can't afford food."

DATE: 5/21/09

SOURCE: CBS News

HEADLINE: Losing Homes and Ending Childhoods

At schools teachers describe Tristen as a sweet boy: smart and innocent.

"I feel lucky about my life because right now I'm not really on the street or in a cardboard box," Tristen said.

Instead, he and his mom live in the El Dorado Motel on a busy street in a tough neighborhood in Salinas, Calif. There are 22 other homeless families here.

They landed here after she lost her job in January as a job coach for people with disabilities. That means a cramped space, no car and no health insurance. There's just a bed for her, an air mattress for him, and a plastic bowl for Tristen's turtle. Last week Rhonda's \$90 weekly unemployment check stopped.

"I try to save food," Tristen said.

"What do you mean?" Pitts asked.

"If we're going to run out of food I'll only eat a little of it and save it for later," Tristen said.

His grades have dropped - he'll have to repeat 5th grade. His self esteem is falling. And he is often afraid.

"I thought I was going to lose everything yesterday," Tristen said. "I thought we were going to lose everything."

"That scare you because that's a possibility?" Pitts asked.

"Yeah," Tristen said.

"Because you've lost things before?" Pitts asked.

"Yeah, I have," Tristen said.

Behind his Harry Potter face is a child in crisis. With his mother's permission, Pitts and Tristen kept talking.

"Find the words for me," Pitts said.

"Life and death," Tristen said.

"You think about life and death?" Pitts asked. "Why do you think about things like that?"

"Because I gave up," said Tristen, crying.

DATE: 5/21/09

SOURCE: CBS News

HEADLINE: Losing Homes and Ending Childhoods

For the homeless children at the El Dorado Motel, life is often bleak. But there are a few bright spots. Like many school districts across the country, Salinas has a homeless children's advocate. Cheryl Camany helps identify homeless children and provides resources and free supplies.

As for Tristen Clarke, he says he has one *real* friend - 8-year-old Gus Hernandez, Jr. They're neighbors. Gus is also homeless.

"Me and him share the same life," Tristen said. "He understands me and I understand him."

They also share the same risk. Even a simple game of soccer can be dangerous ... when the ball rolls right into traffic. For their safety, the boys were ordered back to their rooms by the motel owner.

Anger and frustration brews in Gus every day. He lives with both parents and 4-year-old brother. They owned a house until Gus Sr. lost his job as a mortgage loan processor. The bank foreclosed on their home.

"My life is dumb," said Gus Jr. "We have to live in a motel, have to be in at a certain time. Can't play anywhere, and most of my friends are there."

"That must be hard?" asked Pitts.

"Today was a worse day, tomorrow may be better," Gus said.

"That makes you an optimist?" asked Pitts.

"Yeah," Gus said.

Later, Pitts went to talk to Tristen.

"What do you want Americans to know about you, what it means to be a child and homeless in America?" Pitts asked.

"We need people to help," Tristen said.

Children of the recession - for whom childhood has all but past them by.

DATE: 5/21/09

SOURCE: CBS News

HEADLINE: Losing Homes and Ending Childhoods

Where you can offer help if you're able, or receive help if you need it:

- Salinas City Elementary School District
District Outreach Consultant/Homeless Liaison, 840 South Main Street, Salinas, CA 93901
ATTN: Cheryl Camany
ccamany@monterey.k12.ca.us
831-753-5600

* Please indicate on check if you would like your donation to go directly to the Clarke and Hernandez families or to all homeless children identified in the Salinas School District

- [The Salvation Army](#) or, the [Monterey, Calif., Salvation Army](#) which has been helping these families.
- [Family Promise of Sacramento](#)
- [Mustard Seed School](#)
- [The National Center on Family Homelessness](#)
- [National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth](#)