



STORIES FROM NEIGHBORS

“I had to pinch myself a couple of times.”

At 27, after a stretch of homelessness spent in a car with no air conditioning, alongside the dogs who have been his help for seven years, Tony moved into an apartment he chose on June 22, 2026.

TOLD BY TONY · WITH HIS CONSENT · AS TOLD TO SEAN MARIMPIETRI · INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON JUNE 12, 2026; TONY MOVED INTO HIS UNIT ON JUNE 22 2026

For Tony, home has been a car: him, the dogs, a set of clothes, and no air conditioning. “It’s been a whirlwind between the weather changing and having to find a nice place to cool down, especially with me and the dogs and a blazing car,” he says. “It was hard.” Last summer it was almost 90 degrees; he drove for Uber and DoorDash to keep going, and steered for parks and grocery stores, anywhere with shade or cool air for him and the dogs. “It’s been a struggle to make sure I could get back and forth to where I need to be.”

Ask what felt furthest out of reach, beyond shelter, and his answer is solemn and heartbreaking. “I wanted to see my sister. I wanted to see her grave site,” he says. “I planted flowers for her about a year ago, and it’s been almost a year since I’ve been over there.” Going meant miles he couldn’t risk putting on the car that was also his home. “It’s been hard for me not to go see her.”

He had looked for help before, online and by asking around, and come up empty. A year without work wore at him. “I almost gave up for a little bit,” he says.



“It felt like a glimmer, a help, a hope.”

— TONY, ON MEETING THE HOUSING SPRINT TEAM

Then Tony came in touch with a Housing Sprint Team made up of staff from Housing for New Hope and the City of Durham’s Community Safety Department. They were working on a new homelessness system initiative: Housing Sprints.

“When you gave me the opportunity for the program, I was ecstatic over it. I wanted to make sure it was true. I had to pinch myself a couple of times.” What surprised him most was the speed. “I was not expecting the whole turnout.”

Within 38 days, Tony viewed an apartment he liked—and moved in.

“I just want my own space,” he says, somewhere “to get out the heat and the cold, and to actually do something for myself.” A door of his own, room to plan, and a stable place for the dogs, who “have been my help for the past seven years.” He’s also setting life goals, naming that he is interested in “some kind of trade or some kind of class.” And Tony is eager to mend what homelessness strained: “mostly straighten up relationship with family, if I can, or relationship with friends.”

7

YEARS HIS DOGS HAVE BEEN HIS HELP

38

DAYS FROM PAPERWORK TO MOVE-IN

If someone asks whether Durham should keep doing this, Tony has his answer ready. “I really think that it’s important for people to have this program,” he says. He rides the bus now; he sees who is still out there. “They don’t know who to turn to, who to actually help them out.” And he is exact about what made his own path possible: “If I didn’t have the people that was in my corner, I wouldn’t survive, and some people don’t have that in their corner.”

Tony’s last word is for everyone who might follow in his footsteps to housing – and everyone who could support neighbors into housing. “I’m a supporter of helping the community,” he says, and of the chance to “lift up the next person that can do for the next person.”

THE INVITATION

Tony’s keys arrive because people stayed in his corner: staff who kept coming back, a neighbor who helped feed his dogs, a friend who fixed the car, a landlord with a unit he could choose. He said it himself: “I really want more people to feel like this.” If you want to take part – a unit to lease, dollars to give, or volunteer time – write to hope@durhamnc.gov. The work is yours as much as anyone’s.

BEHIND THIS STORY

- ◆ **Consent** — Tony gave written consent at the outset, on June 12, 2026, the day of the interview with Sean Marimpietri, covering the story and the name used here. Consent is gathered once, at the top of the process. One thing stands permanently: if Tony ever asks us to take this story down, we will.
- ◆ **The system's part** — The homelessness system consists of many agencies — across non-profit, governmental, educational, healthcare, and business sectors — that work to serve people who are experiencing homelessness. The work reflected in stories of neighbors is always the result of deep collaboration and commitment across partners.
- ◆ **The record** — “The past seven years” with his dogs (“seven, eight years now”) and the year without work are Tony’s own accounting, quoted as he told it. Tony moved into his new unit on June 22, 2026. No photograph accompanies this story.

