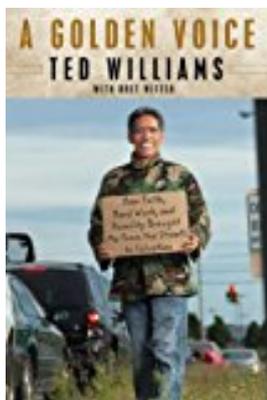


# [PDF] A Golden Voice: How Faith, Hard Work, And Humility Brought Me From The Streets To Salvation

Ted Williams - pdf download free book

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**Description:**

**About the Author** Ted Williams grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, and served in the army before becoming the #1 drive-time DJ in Columbus, Ohio. Addicted to crack, he eventually lost his job and spent seventeen years homeless on the streets of Columbus. He left long-term rehab in the

fall of 2011 and currently lives in a Columbus suburb.

Bret Witter is a five-time *New York Times* bestselling author with more than two million books in print, including #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Dewey: The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World*. He lives with his wife and two children in Louisville, Kentucky.

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### Prologue

It's hard for me to watch the famous minute-long clip on YouTube, the one of me standing on the street corner with my little cardboard sign. The world might hear a homeless man with a golden voice saying, "When you're listening to nothing but the best of oldies, you're listening to Magic 98.9," but I see a version of myself I don't like: crazy hair sticking out in all directions, unshaven, brown rotten teeth, dirty camouflage jacket. I see the desperate eyes of a hustler out of hustles, an addict at the end of two decades of bad decisions with nothing left to do but smile and perform for a guy who rolls down his window and says those famous nine words: "I'm going to make you work for your dollar."

I'm embarrassed. I really am. Because that video is no lie. That was my life. Back in the day, I used to be somebody—a husband, a father, a successful radio personality. Then, on August 20, 1988, I smoked crack cocaine, and over a period of two months it took hold of me until I was smoking cat litter off my filthy floors because I thought it might be crack, and selling my son's baby clothes for drugs. I lost everything: my job, my home, my children, my morals, my self-respect; and for almost twenty years, right up until the morning I appeared on the *Today* show in January 2011, I was a homeless addict.

This is not a pretty book, because homelessness and addiction are not a pretty life. The things I've done and the places I've been might send shivers down your spine. I laid up in grimy crack houses. I robbed my prostitute girlfriend's clients in seedy motels. I carried my clothes in a plastic bag and went weeks without a shower. I coned my poor momma. I stole from my only friends. I slept for three days in a nest of spiders at the bottom of a concrete staircase, comatose on crack, and walked around with holes in my shoes so bad the snow came in and peeled the flesh off the bottom of my feet. I kept a mental list of every store I'd stolen from and which clerk was working at the time, because over a period of decades, in an endless desperate hustle for drug money, I burned the retail sector of Columbus, Ohio, to the ground. And I smoked crack cocaine with every last cent.

I ate my grandson's baby food, even though I knew my daughter couldn't afford more. I smoked the money my mother sent me to attend my father's funeral, then had the nerve to call long-distance on the day they put him in the ground and ask for more. I lived in condemned buildings, abandoned restaurants, and once, for several months, under a tent I made out of children's raincoats. I crapped in buckets. I ate pizza off the ground. I cursed men and used women and once, God help me, broke my girlfriend Kathy's arm in three places with one unfortunate slap.

You're not going to like me for some of this book. I'm going to tell you that now. There will be times when you want to turn away. Everybody else did. My momma. My children. My ex-wife. The social workers, the do-gooders, the drug counselors. Heck, I even turned away from my own life. I fell into a hopeless state of mind and soul, because I was an addict and my life had shrunk to the point that it was nothing but crack—and who would want to look at that?

Only Kathy, a fellow addict, stayed with me.

Only Kathy . . . and God. He was always talking to me, always trying to send me down the right path. I thought the voice was in my head, and I didn't want to hear it. I didn't want to acknowledge Him, because I knew I was doing wrong and I didn't think I had the strength to do right. Finally, when I reached the end of my chain, I listened. Not half listened, telling myself, "It's okay to do what you're doing, Ted, you're still a Christian," but really listened. Really acknowledged God in my heart.

And what did He do? He put me on the street corner to panhandle. For twenty years of homelessness, I had shaken my head at people who stood on corners. In my distorted worldview, stealing was better. Prostitution was better. Anything was better, anything, than standing on the street, in full view of everyone, and begging for a dime.

So that's where God sent me: to the street corner for one hour, every day, rain or shine. He sent me not for the money. He sent me not to be discovered by *Today*—that happened months later by accident—but to humble me. And believe me, I was humbled. I was humbled when people rolled down their window to yell "Get a job, n\*gger," or threw soda cans at my head, or when my own grown children drove by and looked the other way so they wouldn't have to acknowledge their daddy, the bum.

So, yes, I cringe when I see that YouTube video, because I see a man as low as any man can ever go. But I smile, too, because I see a man who's trying. I see a man who's turned it over to his Higher Power, who's walking (slowly, slowly) in the way of the Lord, who's facing his demons in the only way he knows how. I was in pain. I was embarrassed. But that pain and embarrassment was the reawakening of things I thought I'd killed off long before: Self-respect. Hope. And love. Especially love.

More than anything, though, I'm grateful. I'm grateful to Doral Chenoweth, the videographer from The Columbus Dispatch who took that video; and I'm grateful to the forty million people (and counting) who viewed it, because that video changed my life. On January 4, 2011, the day I became a YouTube sensation, I didn't know what YouTube was. I didn't know what the Internet was, because I'd been homeless since 1993, long before most people went online. Not only had I never touched a computer, I didn't know MTV had more than one channel. I didn't know hip-hop and Rush Limbaugh had taken over the radio. I'd never even heard of Fox News, Mos Def, or Conan O'Brien. Like many homeless people, I had a pay-as-you-go cell phone, which I periodically bought minutes for, but otherwise, twenty years of technology and culture had passed me by.

Twenty years of life had passed me by.

So when my friend Mark called and told me, "They been talking about you on the radio," I was shocked. "Everybody's looking for you," Mark said. "Everybody wants to hear that golden voice."

"You joking me?"

"Nah, it's true."

Man, I got excited. I used to be the number one morning-drive DJ in Columbus, Ohio, and when I heard radio I thought someone wanted to give me a job. Radio was my identity—it was even my name on the street—but I hadn't been on the radio since 1996. A radio job meant a hot meal, clean water, a place to live, a shower, a toothbrush, an indoor toilet, but more than that it meant the end of humiliation, the end of degradation, and the return of a decent life.

So I called my friend Al Battle, the only person I knew with a car.

"They're talking about me on the radio, Al. They're telling me to come to WNCI tomorrow morning.

Can you drive me?"

I spent that night on a stranger's couch. Didn't take a shower because I didn't want to impose. When Al picked me up on my begging corner, Interstate 71 and Hudson, I was huddled in the same camouflage coat I'd worn every day that winter.

"There must be someone famous down here," Al said when we pulled into the station parking lot and saw the camera crews and television trucks.

We walked into the studio, and bam, I was mobbed. "You okay, Ted? You need anything? You mind if we call you Ted?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you better comb your hair, Ted. You'll be on the *Dave & Jimmy* show in five minutes, and there's a live television feed to the *Today* Show in New York."

"What?"

"You're world famous, man, didn't you know? Everybody wants to hear from the homeless man with the golden voice."

Next thing I knew, I was on the air. I don't know what I said, but people liked it, I guess, because halfway through the show the Cleveland Cavaliers offered me a PR announcer job. Then a voice-over agent from California said he could make me a million dollars. A million dollars! That was too much. The day before, I'd been a panhandler. Half an hour before, I'd been an anonymous homeless guy walking into a local radio station, praying for \$200 voice-over work.

Now I was . . . famous? All those television trucks outside were . . . for me?

The live feed to *Today* didn't work. So they came up with a new plan. They were flying me to New York City *right* now, so I could appear in the studio the next morning.

I didn't have an ID. I hadn't had an official identity, apart from a prison record, for more than a decade. *Today* had to take me to the courthouse for registration, then a homeless shelter for proof of residency, then the DMV—where we were allowed to cut to the front of the line . . . at the DMV!—for a driver's license, because that was the only way they'd let me on an airplane.

But the next morning, there I was, from the outhouse to the penthouse, saying those famous words to millions nationwide with my golden voice: "From NBC News, this is *Today* with Matt Lauer and Meredith Viera, live from Studio 1A in Rockefeller Plaza."

Then I sat down beside Matt Lauer (who, I admitted a few days later on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, had "brought out the woman in me") for a ten-minute interview. I had a haircut, a clean shave, and a new green sweater, but I was still wearing my camouflage jacket. I was still Ted Williams, the man from the street.

And the most important ...

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