

This article features Lindsey Krinks, co-founder and new staff member of Open Table Nashville, and Ken Goslin who was homeless and surrounded by Open Table in the last eight months of his life.

A LIFE RESURRECTED

As a once-homeless man nears death, he feels more alive than he ever did

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Written by Bob Smietana



Ken Goslin, 47, communicates with his note pad as his friend Lindsey Krinks, a homeless outreach worker and Vanderbilt Divinity School student, watches in his room at the Drake Inn. / SAMUEL M. SIMPKINS / THE TENNESSEAN

This Easter, Ken Goslin is plotting a resurrection of his own, from his room at the Drake Inn on Murfreesboro Pike. Goslin, who has been homeless most of his life, is dying from a brain tumor that has left him unable to walk or speak. He once feared facing his last days alone, forgotten on the streets of Nashville. Instead, he is surrounded by friends. They say he will live on in the way he influenced people's ideas about faith, courage and friendship. Even though he is dying, he feels more alive than ever.

Goslin's road to resurrection began with one word, written on a note pad. "Help." It was May 2010, and Goslin was sleeping at the Nashville Rescue Mission at night and spending his days rolling his wheelchair around downtown. Things were not going well. Goslin had recently moved to Nashville from Atlanta, and in the process, his disability check from Social Security was suspended. His debit card from his bank in Atlanta was not working. A tumor in the back of his head was robbing him of his ability to speak. He communicated by writing notes on a pad. For years, he had battled depression and lived as a loner, unwilling to get close to other people or trust them. He felt like giving up and ending his life. Then he approached the right person — Lindsey Krinks, a homeless outreach worker — on the right day at Church Street Park in downtown Nashville. He held up his note pad.

He jokes that Krinks' good looks first caught his attention. He also thought she looked kind and might be willing to help him. "She had heart," he wrote. "She seemed as if she cared." Krinks, slender, blond and now a student at Vanderbilt Divinity School, sat down with Goslin in the shade at the park and

asked what she could do to help. Not long after that first conversation, the two struck up a friendship. Krinks helped Goslin straighten out his problems with Social Security and the bank. She also began to draw out Goslin's story — a slow process relayed through text messages and on stacks of notebooks.

Life on the streets

Goslin was born in San Francisco in 1963 and spent his childhood in foster homes and group homes. By the age of 7, he had moved to Georgia with another foster family, who he says abused him. He learned to trust no one, feeling that no one cared for him. "Slept in the basement on the dirt with only a blanket in the dark while everyone else was upstairs," he wrote on a note pad. "Foster family — that was the worst. ... So at the ripe ole age of 14 I left home to live on the streets."



His life since that time is a blur. He worked at times — cleaned chimneys for a while and drove a cab — and bounced on and off the streets. There were bouts with booze and drugs. "Shouldn't be here today," he wrote. "Should be dead." He left Atlanta in 2010, saying he wanted to live in a smaller city like Nashville.

"He was getting lost in the shuffle down here," said Karen Whitney of Douglasville, Ga. Whitney befriended Goslin through a meals program for homeless folks in Atlanta. The two text every day. He calls her his adoptive mom, though she is only a few months older than he is. She said she's amazed at Goslin's ability to persevere, especially after living most of his life on the street. "Can you imagine going your whole life like that? How would you feel about the world?" she said. "I am proud to call him my son."

In December, Goslin's health took a turn for the worse. He sent a text to Krinks saying he had been admitted to the Vanderbilt hospital. Doctors told him that the tumor, diagnosed months earlier, was growing, and he probably had six months to live. His options were an operation, which he might not survive, or hospice care. Goslin feared he might survive but end up in worse shape, unable to live on his own. So he chose hospice care. Despite his challenges, he is fairly independent. He keeps his medical records in the table by his bed and keeps his medications sorted in a box. Because he can't swallow, he feeds himself a liquid diet of cans of TwoCal HN through a feeding tube in his stomach.

One of the few pleasures he has these days is smoking. He cuts the filters off his Maverick cigarettes so he can get more tobacco taste. He can still get around in his wheelchair on good days and relishes any chance he gets for a taste of Starbucks coffee. And he's rarely alone. Krinks comes to visit often, as do other volunteers from Otter Creek Church, where she attends. He also has become close to Lauren Jones, his nurse from Guardian Hospice, who visits him three days a week. "I thought I could make him feel less alone," she said. "He has made me feel less alone as well."

'Here for a reason'

Goslin was the guest speaker at a Wednesday night vespers service at Otter Creek Church. The Rev.



Scott Owings, a hospice chaplain who leads the Wednesday night services, put together a PowerPoint presentation of an interview with Goslin. Jones and Krinks also spoke. Some musicians also played Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Free Bird*, a song that Goslin said he wants played at his funeral. In the presentation, Goslin writes about feeling that God loved him for the first time in his life. He calls himself a believer and says that Easter and the resurrection of Jesus are the most important part of his faith. He says his faith keeps him from giving up. And he's not afraid.

"I am a believer," he wrote later. "I believe I am here for a reason, I know I am loved and cared for." When he dies, he wrote, he knows he will be with Jesus. "I know where I am going." Jones told congregation members at Otter Creek that Goslin has taught her how to be brave despite desperate circumstances and to appreciate the beauty in every day. "That is what I would say at his funeral, so I decided to tell him now," she said. "The way he finds a way to laugh at whatever circumstances — that has taught me what joy is."

Owings said that Goslin reminds him of a passage from *2 Corinthians*: "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Goslin may be dying, Owings said, but his life and soul are being healed. "I think the dying realize how close God is to them," he said. "In our brokenness and in our letting go is where we so often find God."

Still, on bad days, Goslin knows the end is near. "I feel kinda trapped," he wrote. On the days when he feels overwhelmed, Krinks and other friends try to comfort him. Krinks said she still has a lot to learn from him. "I told him, 'Ken, you have a lot be frustrated about and a lot to be fed up with,'" she said. "'But you still have a lot of loving to do, a lot of stories to tell, and a lot of lives to touch.'"



Goslin's sense of humor often keeps his visitors laughing, even after they leave. And he doesn't hide his feelings — often poking fun at his situations. Because he can't eat, he turns off the TV anytime a cooking show comes on. When a staff member from Guardian dropped off more pills for Goslin — he is on at least eight medications — he shook his head in mock disgust. Goslin said he regrets that it took so long for him to realize that God cares for him. But he's not afraid anymore. When asked why, he gave another one-word answer on his note pad. "Faith."