

For Vendor Jimmie Wade III, 'Real Change is my sanctuary'

By TOBIAS COUGHLIN-BOGUE
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Jimmie Wade III — originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin — has not had it easy in life, to say the least.

For starters, he was run over by a train at 13 and lost his legs. As if that wasn't enough, in 2013 he got shot through the arm, back and side. Though he's in a power chair now, at that point he had prosthetic limbs and was ambulatory. He was standing with a group of people when someone decided to shoot at them. He said they were getting even for something. He had no idea what.

"The other two people died; I lived," Wade said, showing off a 10-inch-long scar on his right forearm.

As the only surviving witness and fearing retaliation, he made the decision to flee town. He went from Milwaukee to Washington to stay with a cousin.

His first landing point was Tacoma, where he stayed for about two and a half years, renting a room from his uncle. His mother joined him in Tacoma, but both ultimately ended up homeless. His mother made it into shelter, moving from there to an apartment. For six months, Wade stayed with her, sleeping on the couch or floor.

"Then the landlord told us that if I wasn't gone they were going to go up on our rent and all this shit," he said. Things ultimately worked out, though. Wade called 211, a hotline meant to connect people to services.

"I called 211, and that sent me to the YWCA. The YWCA told me to find an apartment, and they were gonna pay the real. So I found an apartment, and they paid my rent for two years," he said.

In 2020, he moved into the Frye Apartments in downtown Seattle. Through it all, he said, "I didn't have nothing but my momma. I couldn't rely on nothing but my once-a-month check and my mother."

Sadly, she passed away last year. That's when Wade got started with Real Change. He was friends with a vendor, who recommended the paper.

"He knew what I was doing," Wade said. "I was stealing and panhandling. Shoplifting. He said, 'Man, why don't you try this here?'"

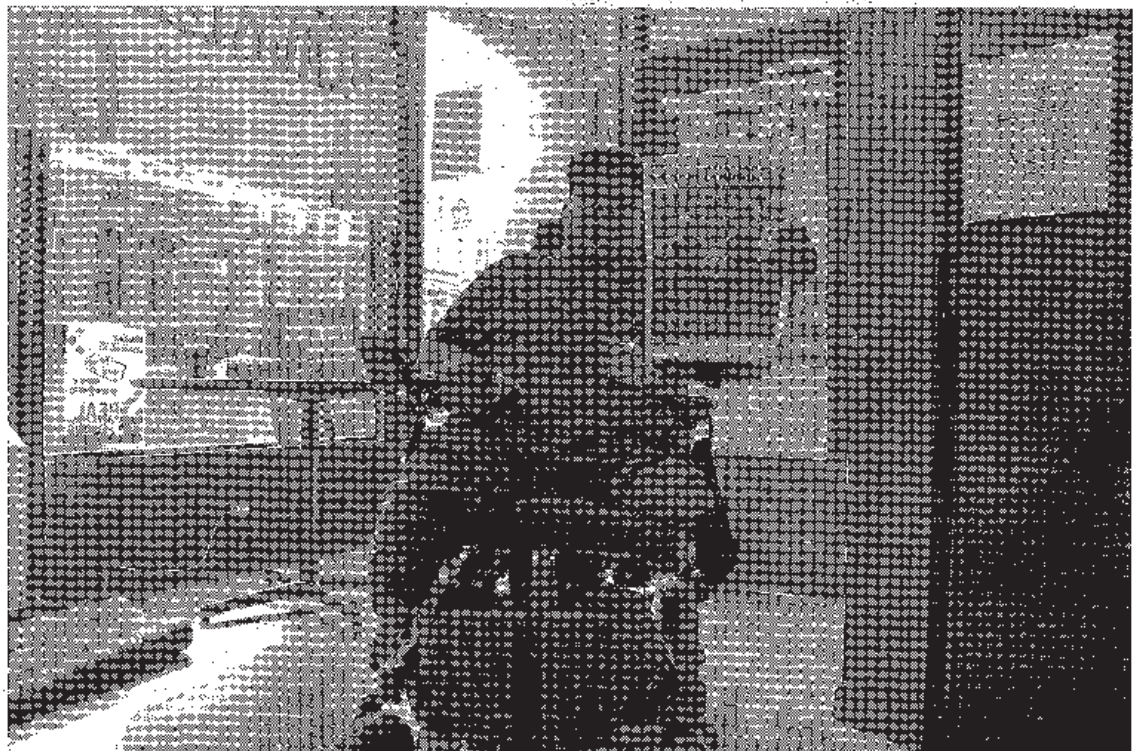


Photo by Tobias Coughlin-Bogue

Real Change vendor Jimmie Wade III misses his hometown of Milwaukee, but he says, "I love Washington."

He did, and he hasn't looked back.

"It beat the hell out of panhandling and stealing!" he said. Besides that, it's helped him stay independent.

"When I was staying in the Frye, I had an incident where a guy called me a racial slur, so I bust his head," he recalled. One might think the racist would be out, but it was Wade who got the boot. Steve Bass, a housing mitigator with the Public Defenders Association, which Wade worked with, paid for a hotel, but Wade said he was also able to pay for some of it himself by selling Real Change.

"That's how I was eating, through Real Change. Real Change helped me out, man. Saved my life," he said. "Real Change is my sanctuary."

Now, he's pretty well set up.

"I miss Milwaukee, but I love Washington. I got a nice apartment; I got housing.

They gave me a housing voucher through the King County Housing Authority. I got everything I need," he said. He spends most of his time at home watching movies, he said, mostly Westerns.

"I'm a movie critic; I got a Roku TV. I got one in my living room and one in my bedroom," he said. His recommendation? As a critic, he's a little easier on Kevin Costner than others and says "Wyatt Earp" is his favorite Western.

Mostly, though, he likes getting out and doing something that gives him purpose.

"I'm not no slouchy person," Wade said. "I got no legs, and I got up and I go out and I do what I got to. I can't just lay around!"

He sells up on 85th and Greenwood, at the Bartell Drugs there. It's a good spot, he said, and he's figured out a successful approach to selling.

"You have to have the patience. You

have to have a voice. You can't just sit down and hold a newspaper and think somebody's going to buy it because it's Real Change," he said. Thus, when someone doesn't know what Real Change is, he's happy to explain.

"It's about culture. It's not a regular newspaper; it's a local newspaper. And it helps. It keeps you on-to-date on certain events, current events. It took a lot of people off the street," he tells them.

Wade definitely considers himself one of these people.

"That's what I wanted to put in the paper, I wanted to let them know that through Real Change, I have overcome a lot of trials," Wade said. "I don't ask nobody for nothing now." ■

Jimmie Wade III's badge number for Venmo payments is 14553.