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By GREG B. SMITH | NEW YORK DAILY NEWS |

 **EXCLUSIVE:** Former NYC media player finds himself living in homeless shelter after life took ‘unfathomable’ downward spiral

Sherman Jackson, a former heavy hitter in the city's media, is now homeless and living in a dangerous Brooklyn shelter. (Susan Watts/New York Daily News)

Once upon a time in New York City, Sherman Jackson lived at the glittering heights of public life in a privileged place of bold-faced names and media stars.

For a time, he appeared on TV sets citywide as a newsman at NBC. Later he appeared on-air as a press secretary for some of the biggest politicians in the city.

The schools chancellor. The parks commissioner. Controller candidate Herman Badillo. He stood in front of cameras and parried with reporters, shaping the narrative of the city itself.

From the 1970s into 2000, Jackson's quotes appeared in every newspaper in town. In the pre-internet era, he was interviewed countless times on radio and TV.

He carried an impressive address book filed with the private numbers of big name politicians who relied on his advice. He spoke with the authority of a major player, a savvy insider.

And then it all went south.

Things happened. Situations changed. Life, as it sometimes does, took a turn, and Jackson came to realize that for some of us, everything you think you will have forever suddenly isn't there anymore.

And so on Friday, Jackson, now 70 years old, awoke once again in a big open dormitory room along with 24 other men, a resident of a city-run homeless shelter hard by the entrance to the BQE.

This is his ninth month in a shelter, and he has not yet found a way out. Last week when a Daily News reporter asked him if he ever thought he would be where he is now, he could not find the necessary words to answer.

Instead he spoke of all the places he'd been, the famous people he knew, the amazing times he'd had. He simply could not cope with the question in person.

Instead he took some time and did what he used to do for a living — he wrote it down and emailed it to the Daily News.

"While I had ups and downs in my life and career, being in a homeless shelter is something that was unfathomable and would never have occurred to me," he wrote. "Even now, it's surreal. Every day starts with some sort of conflict, and every day I awaken hoping it's all been a nightmare — only to realize it's real."


In his new home, a men's shelter in downtown Brooklyn, he says the residents fight over everything. A perceived glare. The lights. What's on the TV set that, at times, is tuned to the evening news — a program Jackson once knew well.

Half Puerto Rican, half white, he went to work on-air for NBC's local affiliate on Channel Four in 1971 at the age of 21 fresh out of Columbia Journalism School. He later jumped to Channel Five, which was then owned by a now-defunct company called Metro Media. From there he jumped into public relations.

His job put him in the media maelstrom every day.

In the late '70s and into the 1980s, he created TV-friendly press events, first for the city's Parks Commissioners Gordon Davis, then for Davis' theatrical successor Henry Stern.

In 1983 and '84, he fended off a barrage of press questions — particularly from the Daily News — for the brief and chaotic reign of city Schools Chancellor Tony Alvarado, who was forced to resign due to a financial scandal.

The mid-1980s, Jackson was press secretary for Schools Chancellor Anthony Alvarado (c., with Jackson behind him).

The mid-1980s, Jackson was press secretary for Schools Chancellor Anthony Alvarado (c., with Jackson behind him). (Jim Hughes/New York Daily News)

Perhaps his highest profile tenure came in 1993, when he was top spokesman for the late Rep. Herman Badillo during his tumultuous and ultimately unsuccessful run for mayor on a fusion ticket with Rudy Giuliani.

After that came a series of PR jobs on Team Giuliani, starting with the city's Off-Track Betting Corp. There he wound up leaving after his volatile boss, OTB President Allie Sherman, a former New York Giants coach, physically assaulted him over a minor dispute.

His final stint at City Hall was at the Civilian Complaint Review Board, the watchdog agency that at the time was being accused of holding back on probing cop misconduct.

There, he says he was forced out when an NYPD commander objected to his use of the term "Five-Oh" in pamphlets CCRB distributed to youths to improve police-community relations.

For years, he worked multiple freelance gigs for venues such as Spanish-language newspapers and New York 1, living in a rent-stabilized Upper West

Side apartment. In 2008 his landlord was offering him a big check to move, so he took the buyout and moved in with his son in Florida.

This did not work out. His son, he says, kept taking what little money he earned as a freelancer and from a \$2,100 monthly Social Security benefit he collected due to a chronic stomach disease that's hobbled him for years.

After a fight over money, he decided it was time to move back to the Upper West Side apartment once rented by his mother and now occupied by his sister and her boyfriend.

For the next seven tumultuous years, the three adults tried to live in the one-bedroom at Columbus Ave. and W. 71st St. With his illness, he could no longer find freelance work and was living only off his benefit check. He paid his sister \$570 a month.

The relationship soon fell apart. He says his sister is mentally unstable and began to call 911 on him, accusing him of a long list of outrages. In 2016, he says she physically attacked him, and this time he called the police.

She was arrested and at the precinct began leveling more accusations against him. This time she got a protective order barring him from her apartment.

He moved back in with his son, who was now in Staten Island, and in April 2017, he obtained a protective order against his sister.


By July his health was deteriorating along with his relationship with his son. Again, Jackson says, he was forced to move out. This time he relocated to a cheap hotel.

The hotel bills soon began to eat up his benefits check, and he found himself standing outside the foreboding 30th Street Men's Shelter next to Bellevue Hospital in Kips Bay, Manhattan.

On Aug. 8, he entered "the system."

"I was scared to death because of what I had heard, the element I saw there," he said. "The homeless individuals, drug addicts, drunks, a lot of felons."

He was put in a private room for a couple of weeks, then sent upstairs to live in a dorm within the "assessment" unit on the seventh floor. There he began his quest to get the city Department of Homeless Services to find him transitional housing.

The 70-year-old is living in a dorm room in the 62-bed facility.

The 70-year-old is living in a dorm room in the 62-bed facility. (Susan Watts/New York Daily News)

He was at 30th Street for five weeks. His cell phone was stolen. On his 70th birthday, Sept. 15, Homeless Services staff told him he was moving to another smaller shelter in Brooklyn. They also told him he would have to get there by himself.

"I had two duffel bags," he said. "I protested. They put me on a bus at 10 that night with three others. One was dropped at Wards Island. They dropped two guys in Queens. They dropped me off at 2 a.m."

Jackson now found himself living in another dorm room within the 62-bed facility run by the non-profit group Camba. He says they promised he'd be out by Thanksgiving. He's still there.

Every day he awakens with a lingering feeling of fear. He's a slight 70-year-old man with multiple health issues living with much younger, bigger men, some of whom have just been released from prison.

Since his arrival at Camba, he says he's been repeatedly threatened by fellow residents and had his wallet stolen.

"People fight over the lights," he said. "People are trying to sleep. Others come by and turn on the overhead lights. When you have 25 guys in a dorm, you have different needs. These things become very serious."

"It's chaotic. I counted the number of wheelchair guys in the cafeteria. Seven of 13. This shelter is not handicapped accessible. Now they're placing wheelchair-bound tenants on the second floor," he said. "What if there is an actual fire? You have six or seven guys up on the second floor. Where are they going to go?"

Recently he watched one guy bash another in the head with his cane. He says an alcoholic former lawyer staying at Camba died after a beating there. He heard another resident had been stabbed in the face with a pen.

The contract he signed with Homeless Services says he must accept the first suitable apartment. He's been shown three apartments, and the last one looked promising. The rent was \$1,375 which the city would pay for the first year. After that he would be required to pay no more than half his income with the city picking up the rest. In his view it was worth it.

Jackson said he signed papers to move in, but the landlord said he needed more forms from Homeless Services. The forms never arrived; the landlord gave the apartment to someone else.

"It seems I went from 'Who's who' to 'Who's he?' " he recently wrote to The News. "That's to say, none of my old friends or colleagues who've learned of my circumstances have offered help."

The News contacted several of Jackson's former colleagues from his City Hall days. Only a handful returned the call.

Norman Siegel, the former head of the New York Civil Liberties Union, was one of them. He remembered working with Jackson when he was at CCRB many years ago.

"Sherman Jackson is the face of 21st century homelessness in New York City," Siegel said. "Who would have thought that someone who was a spokesman for New York politicians would wind up in a downward spiral and in a homeless shelter?"

Ex-Mayor Giuliani's former spokeswoman, Chrystine Nicholas (then Lategano), said she was shocked when The News told her of Jackson's fall.

"When I think of the city homeless shelters, I don't think of someone like Sherman," she said. "He's been in the system since August and he wants to get out."

Homeless man breaks into California governor's residence, says he's an 'open-door policy kind of guy' (foxnews.com)

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