

At Northlands Rescue Mission, we begin with the necessities. Here, homeless men and women have a bed to sleep in, three meals a day, and access to clean clothing and a hot shower. However, the Mission is more than just a place to protect against cold and hunger. We strive to give our clients the support and the resources they need to rebuild their lives. That is why we meet with each client individually, to hear their stories and understand their struggles.

We'd like to share one such story with you now. John, a recent client at the Mission, came to us with pain and anger from a difficult past, but also with the determination to build a good future for himself. Since arriving at the Mission in late August, John has been steadily working through his issues, and we are excited for the day that he will begin a new chapter in a new home.



John is originally from Minnesota. In the 1980s, he was a sales rep for a well-known clothing company. John was great with people, and he travelled around with clothing samples, making sales. John loved the job, and he was good at it.

Over six and a half years, John brought sales in his territory from less than 50,000 units to more than 5 million.

In February of 1986, John was unexpectedly asked to resign. To save money, the company was replacing employees making commission with salaried employees. John was one of a number of sales reps who lost their jobs for this reason. John later started his own cab company. For nine years, he dealt exclusively with one railroad company, transporting their employees. In 2009, that company made the decision to eliminate independent contractors and use a single transportation company, leaving John without a contract.

On top of this, John's parents were dealing with significant health issues. His mother had suffered from minor strokes, pneumonia, and more. His father had severe dementia and was unable to care for himself. *"My family more or less volunteered me to take care of my mom and dad,"* John says. *"There's a resentment and bitterness between myself and my family because I was offered no compensation and wasn't able to work [while caring for them]. It was a sad time in my life."*

John's mother passed away in 2010, but he continued to care for his father. Eventually, his father was placed into a home, but John never received compensation for the three and a half years of full-time care he had given to his parents. *"It's a 24 hour, 7 days a week job,"* says John. *"You get no breaks."*

Wanting to get away, John traveled to Peru for what seemed to be a promising job involving the transport of dyes. Horrifyingly, this turned out to be a ruse to get people to unknowingly transport drugs. Authorities in Peru were not interested in determining if John had been tricked, and he faced jail time in a foreign country. John was put into a Peruvian prison, where he spent *"2 years, 360 days, and a few hours."* He recounts this scary time in his life.

"It was absolute hell. I have flashbacks," John says. *"The violence...the drug use. The drug use in prison there is unbelievable. The government is corrupt, the prison system is corrupt. Authorities were abusive. The food is horrendous."*

John returned to the US on August 23rd. He came directly from the airport to Grand Forks, and then to Northlands Rescue Mission. He began meeting with the Mission's social worker, who helped him arrange visits with a psychiatrist and began preliminary steps for John to find housing.

John's experience in Peru put his mind into a perpetual state of alertness, or "survival mode." He was diagnosed with PTSD and has a difficult time trusting others. As John talks with his psychiatrist and others about his experience, however, things are slowly beginning to get easier for him. *"I'm very fortunate and very appreciative of all the help that I'm getting,"* says John. *"It is much needed."*

Northlands Rescue Mission is the only shelter John has been to and, he says, *"it's the only shelter I ever will be at. I will succeed here. The way I look at it, this is life-saving for me."* John's immediate focus at the Mission is on his state of mind. *"I need to fix me, and then I can get out and find work,"* he says. John will continue working with Northlands staff to find housing opportunities. When he is ready, he plans on utilizing Vocational Rehab to find a job.

At some point in the future, John says he would love to get into crop adjusting. He grew up on a farm, and his sales experience would lend itself well to such a job. Crop adjustment involves determining insurance payouts to farmers in the event that their crops are affected. *"Crop adjusting is incredibly important in Minnesota and the Dakotas,"* says John. *"If you have hail damage, if you have too much water...you have to have crop insurance."*

After getting out of the Mission, John wants to make Grand Forks his home. *"I like what I've seen of it, and the people are nice,"* he says. It's also a great place for John to get back to doing the things he loves. That includes hunting, going on walks, and simply enjoying the outdoors.

"For me, this place is saving my life," John says of the Mission. *"It sounds deep, and for me it is deep. To the Mission's donors, I would say, 'This place gives me hope. Literally, it has saved my life, and I am going to succeed.'"*

Thank you for giving John his life-changing opportunity. We are truly blessed to have your support and the chance to serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Shirek". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sue Shirek
Executive Director