

Every so often, we encounter someone who makes a distinct impression on us here at the Mission - not for where they come from or what they've been through, but for the kind of person they are. Vincent is one such individual, and I am excited to share his story with you.

Vincent was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, alongside three siblings. His mother and stepfather made enough money for the family to get by, but not enough for the "extras" in life.

Vincent made the most of his free time as a child. He loved art, music, and learning, and he would engross himself in whatever particular topic caught his attention.



"If I was interested in something I would read up on it," says Vincent. *"I would go to the library on my own. I was that kind of kid who would come home with a bunch of books."*

"As a child, I would play hooky and go to see the Museum of Natural History on my own," says Vincent. *"I would find a class and sneak in with them. I didn't have the money to get in - I think it was \$1.50 for a child to get in. But I would stay there all day and visit the exhibits."*

As he grew, Vincent developed a strong desire to see the world. When he was just seventeen years old, he joined the National Guard and traveled all over the northeastern United States. He ended up in Puerto Rico, where he fell in love, got married, and had a daughter. He built a beautiful home and a great career as a corrections officer.

Fast forward twenty years, and Vincent was now living in Florida after reconnecting with his mother and siblings. He worked with the Federal Bureau of Prisons and then for a timeshare company, where he was one of the top salesmen. Stability was not to last, however.

One day, Vincent had a serious stroke. *"I wasn't taking care of myself, and I guess my health caught up to me,"* he says. Vincent was hospitalized and needed physical therapy. His medical bills quickly drained his savings. Vincent recovered physically, but his mental wellbeing was another story.

"I would forget things," says Vincent. *"I would drop things. I started to get anxiety attacks, which frightened me. I couldn't control it and I didn't understand what was happening to me."*

Things got worse when Vincent's mother was diagnosed with cancer. She was hospitalized and eventually placed in home hospice, far too ill to care for herself. With no offer of help from his siblings, Vincent stepped up. He left his sales job, sold his home, and went to go care for his mother full-time.

"It was only right," says Vincent. *"She's my mom, and she was in pain. I would cook for her and wash her, everything."*

"One day I was out on the porch smoking," says Vincent. *"All of a sudden, I heard, 'Vince...' It was my mom calling me. I went to her room. I saw my mom...her eyes were all glassy. I grabbed her hand and just started stroking her hand. I said, 'It's Vince, mom. I'm here.'" Minutes later, she passed away.*

"I feel like I completed my duties as a son," says Vincent. *"I was there for her, like she wanted. I was happy for that."*

Vincent's siblings were not happy, however. They said he should have called them earlier, and Vincent was upset that he had been left to care for their mother alone. This caused a rift and made Vincent want to escape from Florida.

At this time, Vincent had almost nothing left. All his time and energy had gone towards caring for his mother and his own health in the wake of his stroke. He had a small income from social security, but it wasn't enough.

Vincent began job-hunting online, and that's when he discovered the sugar beet harvest in North Dakota. He jumped into his Honda and began the 1800-mile trip. Along the way, he camped out and slept at rest stops. When he arrived in Grand Forks, Vincent considered sleeping in his car. Thankfully, he found a spot at the Mission instead.

"At the Mission, they treat me well," says Vincent. *"They've given me a roof over my head, they've given me breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Everyone has treated me with decency and respect."*

Vincent quickly gained a reputation around the Mission for being extraordinarily helpful. He is always the first to volunteer for chores around the building. We asked him what compels him to offer so much help.

"Because everyone has helped me!" he replies with a smile. *"How kind the people are around me! 'Vincent, are you okay?' 'Vincent, how are you doing?' I see the kindness and I know...I need to give that back. So anytime someone says 'let's do something' I say, 'Let's go for it! Front of the line, here's Vince!'"*

Vincent is working with the Mission's advocacy team and supporting agencies to take care of his health issues and create a housing plan. He has a few financial obstacles to overcome, then he can get his own apartment in the area.

"I found a beautiful church that I'm going to now," Vincent says. *"My [faith] is very important to me. I feel like everything in my life, since I was a child to being here now...God has his hand on me, keeping me straight, keeping me going. It's with the grace of God that I'm here...that I'm alive."*

It's heartwarming to see how happy and blessed Vincent feels, all because of the kindness shown to him in Grand Forks.

"When the doctors said I couldn't drive all the way from Florida to North Dakota, I drove," says Vincent. *"God was my co-pilot. I love it here. I love the people, and I love God, and I'm happy. It's been a long time since I felt this way."*

Vincent may not yet have a home or perfect health, but he does have two things: **hope** and **a plan**. That's a powerful combination. As a Mission supporter, **thank you** for giving Vincent the chance to recover his life. He is a person who has given perhaps more than he had to give. Now, because of you, he has what he needs to care for himself.

God Bless,



Sue Shirek
Executive Director

*"If the world takes something on the one hand,
God will give us something on the other."*

- St. Vincent de Paul