

*every heart needs a home*

An Equal Opportunity Program

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A United Way Agency

*Dear friend and neighbor,*

With winter's arrival, many of us look forward to spending time with our families and decorating our home for the holidays. As we rejoice in those little things the Christmas season brings, we want to take a moment to thank you for your generous support of Ruth Meiers Hospitality House. By working together, every day we are making a difference in the lives of the men, women and children who need our help - so they may share in our optimism for the future.

As you have most likely heard, providing shelter, food and case management assistance to a record number of people this year has put a strain on our budget. More than ever before, our neighbors are in need of a helping hand just to survive. During National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week, we asked you "Where would our community be without a place for those who are homeless to spend the night?" Today, we would like to share an account of a hard working family who found themselves in an unimaginable situation.

*- Becca and Tom -*

Just a year after Tom and I were married, his employer offered him a promotion and transfer to manage the company's office in Bismarck. We were eager to move away from our hometown to venture out on our own. We had worked hard to finish college and worked even harder to save up enough for a down payment on our first home. Five years and 2 children later, we were infallible. I worked part-time to avoid the high costs of having two boys in daycare and Tom usually worked fifty hours a week at his office. We were the average young couple working hard, just trying to make it. Never did we think we could end up without a roof over our heads.

In an instant, our lives were turned upside-down.

Last winter Tom was in a car accident and since then he has dealt with chronic pain from the injuries. It turned out that he also has two herniated disks in the lowest area of the spine. It has left him unable to work. Some days he is unable to pull himself out of bed without help. At first, I was able to balance



my work schedule and family life while I cared for him after surgery. Still, his chronic pain continued to worsen and eventually his "temporary" replacement at work inherited the job he was no longer able to do.

Even though the accident was not his fault, without Tom's income, we were stuck waiting "patiently" for him to be approved for disability or to receive a settlement from the insurance. By spring, I had used up all of my vacation and sick leave. Hours away at the clinics with Tom now meant I had to take a cut in my part-time income. Many of our bills went unpaid while we simply tried to survive. In just a few short months, one of our cars was given back to the bank and we had received a shut-off notice for the heat and lights. Thankfully, our other vehicle was older but paid for. We barely had enough income to pay the mortgage and buy a tank of gas so I could drive Tom from our house to the clinic on the other side of town.

I remember it like yesterday - the day I walked into Ruth Meiers Hospitality House to ask where I could get help with diapers and possibly some food for my boys. Thinking back, it seems more like a scene from a television show than something that would happen to me in real life. I was embarrassed to be there asking for help, but the staff person was easy to talk to and she quickly put together two bags of food for us and gave me a list of the different places that serve hot meals to anyone in need. I didn't have a family to turn to and those few kind words meant a lot.

We had lived here in Bismarck for almost six years when our home was foreclosed.

I was brought up to believe that if you worked hard this could not happen, but it was happening, and it was happening to me, Tom and our sons, who were just two and three years old. We were HOMELESS, through no fault of our own.

The day we had to pack everything up and leave our house, I confided in a coworker the true reason I wasn't able to come in to work that day. Sarah kindly offered her living room so we wouldn't have to sleep in our car. Tom and I knew it was better than the alternative and that first night we were grateful just to have a roof over

our heads. I couldn't stop thinking about what we were going to do - certainly, we couldn't expect to stay for very long. It quickly became clear that Sarah's two-bedroom apartment wasn't large enough for three adults, four small children and a cat.

My self esteem sunk to an all time low. I was miserable because I could not take care of my kids the way I was supposed to...providing a stable home for my family was constantly on my mind.

I didn't know how much longer we could continue the temporary living arrangement. Tom was still in constant pain and needed another surgery, which we did not have the health insurance to cover. We needed somewhere to go - a place to regain our footing and save for a rental deposit. I was exhausted and it was hard to see the light at the end of tunnel.



We were completely out of resources and had nowhere else to turn. Family and friends back home had their own financial troubles and how would we even explain to them that we were homeless?

Tom and I went to see if there was a room available at Ruth Meiers Hospitality House. We learned that there isn't a family shelter, so Tom checked into the men's emergency shelter at Ruth Meiers...while the boys and I were lucky enough to get the only open bedroom at their women and children's shelter. Although we were separated at night, the boys and I walked up to the men's shelter every day and joined Tom for lunch in the Stone Soup Kitchen. Together, we worked with the case managers at Ruth Meiers and began to see a small ray of hope. Knowing my sons would have food in their tummy and a warm bed to snuggle up in was worth every bit of pride I sacrificed.

While we stayed in the emergency shelters at Ruth Meiers, we received much more than hot meals and a warm bed. Their

positive outlook and network of local resources was amazing. After three and a half months, we finally had received notice about Tom's injury settlement and were able to settle into an affordable apartment, just in time for Thanksgiving.

There are still many hurdles we need to overcome. Knowing that the dedicated staff at Ruth Meiers Hospitality House is with us every step of the way, helps me see our destination and be able to believe that we'll get there.

When most people think of the homeless, they're thinking of "them." The homeless seem to be different from ourselves...they are "others." Until you have been there, homeless people are a hand outstretched on the sidewalk... people that have created their situation through making poor choices or being lazy. And most people would be surprised at how many of these "others" are in our community. Families, couples, people with jobs and without...folks in recovery from all kinds of problems, mental and physical. Whether you have family or not, no matter what your education level is or how hard you work, homelessness does not discriminate. Anyone can become homeless; most of us are just a paycheck away.

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We are so honored to have been not only a part of Tom and Becca's lives this year, but also the lives of hundreds of other people we have helped through our emergency shelter and supportive programs. From January to October, we had already provided an additional 870 nights of shelter than the year before to men, women and children.

**Will you please consider a generous gift that will help us to continue our valuable programs and services to those in need?** We pledge to work with you to provide food and shelter to our less fortunate friends and neighbors in our community. No man, woman or child should ever have to wonder "Where will I sleep tonight?"

With thankfulness in your generosity and wishing you a blessed Holiday Season,

*Kelly Gunsch*

Kelly Gunsch, Director of Development

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*Please accept my/our partnership in saving the lives of the people you serve, giving them food, shelter and hope for a brighter future. Every Heart Deserves a Home.*

\$3,000 \_\_\_\_\_, \$2,500 \_\_\_\_\_, \$2,000 \_\_\_\_\_, \$1,500 \_\_\_\_\_, 1,250 \_\_\_\_\_, \$1,000 \_\_\_\_\_,

\$750 \_\_\_\_\_, \$500 \_\_\_\_\_, \$400 \_\_\_\_\_, \$300 \_\_\_\_\_, \$200 \_\_\_\_\_, \$100 \_\_\_\_\_, Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If you choose to donate on line, please visit our website [www.rmhh.org](http://www.rmhh.org). Our website is secure and your personal information will be safe. Together, we can help men, women, and children find a new beginning. Thank you.**