

Dear ,

Summer 2020

We need to get Mary into a house to save her life.

Mary lives in a tent on the top of a ridge. To reach her camp, we have to climb the side of a steep hill, hoisting ourselves up by roots and branches. In the winter, the hill is nearly impossible to get down, and Mary stays in her tent for a week at a time. She only leaves to use the bathroom and survives off of peanut butter and snowmelt.

Mary is 63-years-old. She has been homeless for nearly fifteen years. We first met Mary over a year ago when we took a group of spring break students out on homeless ministry. We started visiting her every week. Sometimes we just sat on the park bench and drank coffee. Other times we went on trips: to Subway, the art museum, the bowling alley, and the book store. On her birthday, she came to our house and cooked us her mom's famous milk toast.

It's difficult to piece together how Mary ended up in her current situation. During our visits, she shares her stories and thoughts. Mary has a lot of paranoid theories about the world. She believes that fourteen of her children were stolen from her, and that people are using her name and stealing her money. These ideas keep her from signing up for any assistance, getting an ID, or even using technology.

Mary has suffered much in her life, but she has a joy that is rooted in her faith. There are many "Mary-isms" that missionaries have picked up from spending time with her, such as, "His name is Jesus!" She is never shy about proclaiming the name of the Lord. Mary has a special relationship with the Word. She passes most evenings alone in her tent, and she spends this time reading the Bible and praying. She can easily quote Scripture, citing the passage and verse. Mary understands deeply that her life is a gift from the Lord and wants to use her life to give Him glory.



KC missionaries bowling with Mary.

Mary is a poet. At Thanksgiving, she came to our house for a feast with almost 50 other friends of our ministry. She had a great time, and later wrote us a poem in gratitude. She writes poems for many homeless services in the city that have helped her. Mary sees writing as her mission in life. She believes the Lord has kept her alive so she can share her writing with others.

When we met Mary, the thing she wanted most in the world was dentures. She had been using a pair that were made for someone else until they were stolen from her. She was angry and brought it up almost every time we saw her. We called several dental clinics, but none of them would see Mary without an ID. One day, I was driving with Clark and asked him, off-handedly, if he knew any dentists. He told me he had just had lunch with a dentist yesterday.



Mary's new dentures!

They had talked about A Simple House, and the dentist, Dr. Pete Mohn, agreed to offer dental work free of charge to friends of the ministry. Four appointments later, Mary had her dentures!

Aside from dentures, Mary has also talked about wanting her own house. She wants a home that no one can take away from her — a place where she can plant a garden and leave her books and journals full of poetry. For months, we suggested to Mary that she should apply for public housing. We tried reasoning with her in a hundred different ways. Because of her mental illness, each one seemed impossible to Mary. She always had a reason, based in a delusion, of why our solutions wouldn't work. The prospect of getting Mary into housing was beginning to seem bleak.

One day, we took Mary out to Dairy Queen. Eating our sundaes, we came around once again to the topic of public housing. We were all ready to argue some new angle when Mary cut us short. "I'm sick of people telling me what to do with my life. It's *my* life. Do you want to know what you can do? You can pray for me to get my house."

I didn't have much of a response. I told her I would pray, and I did. I prayed a lot. It struck me like a revelation: if I believed that God could accomplish anything, to the point of defeating death, why did I not believe He could get Mary a house? The public housing angle was surely not working. Could I trust him to answer my and Mary's prayers? As I prayed, I hatched a lot of schemes. I planned to go door-to-door begging for money for her house. I drafted emails to a tiny-house builder in Canada and a hermit with a big piece of land in the Ozarks. I even mailed a postcard from the back of a Cheerios box to Ellen DeGeneris, asking for her help.

A couple months later, Clark heard of a house for sale in a neighborhood close to A Simple House. They had to sell quickly, and the home was going for less than \$20,000. Clark met with the seller and sent me pictures. I toured the house later that day. It was a one-bedroom with plenty of yard space for a garden and room for all of Mary's books. It seemed like an obviously

answered prayer. Clark got approval from the Board of Directors and made an offer the next day. Several people had bid, but our offer was accepted. Mary was going to have a house!

We acquired the house right as news of the pandemic came out, and we were able to work pretty heavily on renovations. Jerusalem Farms, a home repair ministry, helped with a lot of the work. The project is wrapping up, and we hope to move Mary in soon.

We are excited that Mary will be indoors by July. She is getting older, and her health is getting worse. Because of her mental illness, she will not apply for housing, and she cannot work. Mentally ill people cannot be forced into any sort of housing or treatment unless they become an imminent threat to themselves or others. At the same time, their mental illnesses often keep them from freely seeking housing. It is a sad fact that many mentally ill people live and die in the woods. We've grown to love Mary in the year-and-a-half we've known her. The idea of her dying alone in the woods is not only a sad thought, but also an injustice.



Tristan working on the new house.

Thank you for making this ministry possible! With your help, we will continue sharing the love of Christ with the poor, and we hope to help more of the mentally ill homeless off the streets.

Yours in Christ,

Mary-Kate Burns *with full-time missionaries Sadie Facile, Ryan Hehman, Tristan Kramer, Clark Massey, Chelsea St. Peter, Margo Wernel, and Gabe Wyllie*

All checks can be made to A Simple House, and all donations are tax deductible. Online donations are accepted at [www.ASimpleHouse.org](http://www.ASimpleHouse.org)

## Special Bunch

Some people I met  
On the homeless trail  
Brought me such blessings  
As an encouraging smile

With thermoses of coffee  
And treats from the truck  
Within a short time  
They were picking me up

Gabe, Matt, Clark,  
Mary-Kate, Yessy, Erin, Margo,  
We'd hop in the car, and off we'd go—

Sometimes out to dine  
Nice to identify as we ride  
Often take seats in a restaurant so fine  
Maybe museum as we enjoy the sights

It says in the Good Book  
“Bring unfortunates to the table”  
It's truth not a fable  
Brotherly love help the unable

What a blessing they were  
Enjoying a Thanksgiving feast  
So many different walks  
I was so-o-o pleased to meet

Priest Daniel gave his honors of prayer  
Asking Jesus come be with us as we share  
Wonderful old friends it was so great to see  
With precious loving hugs such comfort, company

I'm so grateful for friends giving their time for me

Such a banquet of food  
Variety meats, potatoes, gravy,  
Soups, rolls, dressing, so wholesome and savory

Salads, hot, cold, plenty of greens  
Chocolate fondue and pies with whipped cream  
Hot chocolate, coffee, milk, and tea  
They really went to extreme

I really enjoy fast food  
From the drive-up window  
For ribs, burgers, onion rings, french fries,  
Ice cream, hors d'oeuvres, cream sugar cup of joe

But this special feast  
Was an overwhelming treat  
It certainly was  
A true answered dream

God bless this special bunch  
Who looks out for those in need  
I appreciate every bit  
In mine heart you'll always sit.

- Mary B., December 12, 2019