

# the Independent

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## Finding Peace in Her Own Home



*Shirley Berg with her apartment keys*

Shirley Berg likes a happy ending. She watches shows on the TLC network and the Hallmark channel. She especially likes Christmas movies. These shows are a stark contrast to much of Shirley's life. Struggling with bipolar mental illness, she endured years of an abusive relationship and hospitalization. But now Shirley's life is good; she is happy, content, and has no worries.

Shirley, 68, lives in her own apartment in Wahpeton. Her journey there started about five years ago when she was referred to Freedom by Muriel Hedrick, Community Resource Coordinator at the Richland County Health Department. She had just gotten out of a nursing facility in Wilton, ND, where she had been for about a year. Prior to that she had been in the State Hospital in Jamestown for about two years. While hospitalized, her son was made her guardian. She ended up living with her son and his family after discharge.

The hospitalizations came about because Shirley quit taking her medications. A worker from Southeast Human Services found her in very bad shape and brought her to a Fargo hospital. She was then transferred to Jamestown. "I thought I didn't need them," she said. "I learned my lesson now."

Born in Aberdeen, South Dakota, Shirley lived there through the fifth grade. Then her father got a job as an ambulance driver and Emergency Medical Technician in Belcourt, North Dakota. She said it took about a month

for her to blend into her new community, and she later graduated from Belcourt High School. She got married about a year later, and moved to Wahpeton shortly after that. Shirley has worked at a number of jobs: teacher's aide, manufacturing, and for many years as a housekeeper at St. Francis Nursing Home in Breckenridge.

"When I met Shirley she was a woman with high hopes and a strong desire to live independently again," said Joyce Wolter, Independent Living Advocate. "She had much of her belongings in storage and really dreamt about what her apartment would be like. She had plans and had started a savings to make that happen, but the guardianship that she was under made her dreams an impossibility in her eyes and in the county's opinion."

According to Joyce, one of the positive aspects of working in the Wahpeton area is the partnership with people like Muriel. "Muriel and I have a wonderful relationship and collaboration. If I don't have an answer to something I call her and vice versa. We have a similar position in many ways, but it also differs in many ways as well. We refer back and forth to one another when appropriate. We are able to bounce ideas off of one another and assist consumers together if that is appropriate and that is what they want. It is almost like she is a co-worker. We have joked in the past, but sometimes I wonder if it is true, that neither of us can retire until the other one does," she said.

For Shirley, there were several keys to her getting her own apartment. One was getting her guardianship back. With the help of Protection and Advocacy, Legal Aid and the doctors at the Hope Unit Behavioral Health Services, Shirley was able to put everything in place. The process took a year and a half, but in the

end the judge granted her request after a brief hearing lasting all of about two minutes. Her son encouraged her to move into the Northland Apartments so she could have the independence she so desired. She moved there in January 2015. They keep in regular contact and Shirley dearly enjoys her six-month-old granddaughter.

Today Shirley's life consists of taking care of her apartment, with a little help on Wednesdays from Homemaker Services. A nurse visits every two weeks. She spends time with friends. "We go out for coffee or shopping," she said. "I go for my doctor's appointments." Either a friend drives or they take the Senior Ride Service. She is also hoping to quit smoking with the help of a program out of Grand Forks. "I don't want to stand outside and smoke this winter," she said. "It's a terrible habit."

So after years of an abusive relationship, hospitalization, and living in someone else's house, Shirley finally has her own place—and peace. She can now enjoy the simple things we take for granted: household furnishings, pots and pans, buying new curtains, having coffee with her friends, her own couch.

Shirley has always been a social person through all her ups and downs, but now she has a new outlook on life. "Things are good. I'm so relaxed. I never felt better," she said. It's a happy ending, just like a Hallmark movie.

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# INSIDE

# Art of Freedom

Fifty-one artists participated in Freedom Resource Center's 3rd annual "Art of Freedom" held on Tuesday, October 20, 2015 at Dakota Medical Foundation. This year we added a silent auction,

which was a huge success. Thank you to everyone involved for making the "Art of Freedom" possible. Watch for "Save the Date" cards, so you can participate and attend next year's event.



1st place winner David Gangl



2nd place winner Margaret Speer

## EYI

Freedom Resource Center is taking part in Giving Hearts Day for the 5th year in a row. On Monday, December 14, 2015, Space Aliens Grill & Bar is happy to support Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living, Inc. With the proceeds raised YOU will support Freedom in creating a #zerobarriers community for all people with all disabilities. Please bring a copy of the "Space Aliens Helping Earthlings" letter to Space Aliens Grill & Bar (1840 45th St S, Fargo, ND), during normal business hours, on December 14, 2015, and 20% of your total purchase will be donated to Freedom Resource Center.

The Space Aliens Helping Earthlings letter can be picked up at any of the Freedom Resource Center offices. [tanyas@freedomrc.org](mailto:tanyas@freedomrc.org)



3rd place winner Robert Neros



51 new and emerging artists participated



Our first Silent auction



Music provided by Savanna Red

## From Where I Sit



*Nate Aalgaard, Executive Director*

For the past two years I've been working on, struggling with, enduring, a few health-related issues. Some have been resolved, some not. The same thing seems to be happening to others in my life, both friends and family. There have been times of frustration and times of happiness, depending on how things are going on that particular day.

One of the most difficult parts of the process was not being able to drive from June until the middle of October, 2014. Another negative was losing the ability to get myself into bed due to shoulder pain and weakness. That not only impacted my independence, it cost me quite a bit of money to hire more help at home. Even now, five months after neck surgery and multiple medical and therapy appointments each week I still have issues. But I'm not giving up. Not me. If nothing else, I'm persistent.

Through all this time dealing with health issues I've had to adjust my attitude about what a productive day or week is. I can only do so much work-related activity, or I pay the price physically. It's getting better, but I've learned that I need to put a priority on my health. That means rest, exercise, and working on my mental outlook.

I'm trying to live in the moment. For example; a few weeks ago I had cortisone shots in my shoulder. The shots hurt tremendously, but I thought it might give me some pain relief. The next day I did indeed feel better. Instead of claiming that the shots fixed the problem, I just said that I feel better today. That was good enough. If I got a good night's sleep it was just that, one night. I wanted to dwell on the positive aspect of what I felt right then. Tomorrow will bring its own issues, good, bad, or indifferent. I will deal with them later.

Likewise, I object to the belief many people have that if things go well for a while they are bound to be equally bad, or even worse, down the road. We have had exceptionally nice weather around here this fall. That doesn't mean we will "pay for it later" as some are quick to say. How about we just go out and enjoy each and every nice day and not be pessimistic about what might happen.

As a disability rights activists it is also hard to live in the moment. If I look around I see all sorts of things in society that I'd like to change. After all, we just celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the ADA. We have employees

working at Freedom who were not even born when it was passed! Shouldn't everything be done by now?

I used the restroom at a Sanford medical facility today. One of the employees told me that the building is about 10 years old and they had been asking from the beginning if they could get power door openers on the restroom doors. They're not required, but they are great for people like me; especially when we have shoulder, arm, or hand problems. So now there is a power door, but the stall door swings outward and is very difficult to close. The soap dispenser is entirely too high and the paper towels are jammed in the box so tightly that they just rip when I try to pull one out. But those power door buttons sure look nice.

Parking is a terrible problem. If you are a regular reader you know what I'm talking about. We held our ADA celebration at the Fargodome on July 9. They had recently re-stripped the parking lot. Unfortunately it was done incorrectly, with very few access aisles. I have been assured that the problem will be fixed, but it should have been corrected long ago.

And that's what is frustrating about health issues and societal problems—you want it fixed now, not later. On the other hand, you can be negative and angry to the point of not doing yourself or anyone else any good. My solution: do what you can, find some allies to help you, and be patient. But above all, persist. Don't give up just because the task looks difficult.

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2701 9th Ave. S, Suite H  
Fargo, ND 58103

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*“Helping people with disabilities live  
more independently for 25 years”*

Go to [www.freedomrc.org](http://www.freedomrc.org)  
& click



## What's Wrong With This Picture?



Instead of 'Handicapped Lift', perhaps the sign could say "Accessible Lift" or "Wheelchair Lift." More importantly, if this lift is accessible a person using it should not need assistance. We are striving for independent living for all people. Having someone open a door for us as a courtesy is nice. We should not have to depend on someone opening the door so we can get in or out. In the same sense, we should not have to depend on someone to help us use the lift. The lift and its controls should be designed so anyone can use it.

