

The electrical team finished upgrading the wiring in one of the client homes. Carpentry contingent completed installation of a new exterior door: fitting a square door into a not-nearly-square opening. Score one for creative carpentry. The paint personnel scraped and primed a home located only a few blocks from the high school that was demolished by the tornado.

Renewing destroyed buildings is not the only job of our team in Joplin. Sometimes we have the opportunity to renew the spirit. Often we find it is our own spirits that are being renewed. One of our team spends evenings ministering to homeless people in Joplin. This is the story of one of those people.

Mary lives in the park near the Joplin library. She is about 50 years old and has been living on the streets since 2010—before the tornado. Last August one of our team, who has endured a period in his life when he was homeless, met Mary in the park and spent evenings visiting with her. Last evening he met Mary again. She is still living in the park because she does not like to stay in the mission.

While visiting with Mary, he learned she is from Illinois. She took to the streets after the death of her father with whom she had lived since childhood. Her mother died giving birth to her, and her father raised her. He was a truck driver and took her on long hauls. After his death, she was lost and rudderless. She chose Joplin because she had passed through Joplin during one of the truck trips with her father.

Many people have approached Mary to push “salvation” on her. Our team member knows first-hand, that this type of “rescue” is typical in the street scene. Social workers ask if she wants to leave the streets and search for housing and a better way of life. She no longer trusts these agencies, but she immediately connected with our team member. She will accept gifts like a new tee shirt, but she has physical and mental issues and won't stray far from Joplin's park and library.

Our team member will continue to visit with Mary as long as we are in Joplin. Because of his unique life experience, he can show her that there are people who care. Renewal and reconstruction happens one house at a time and one life at a time. And there is always more work to do.

