

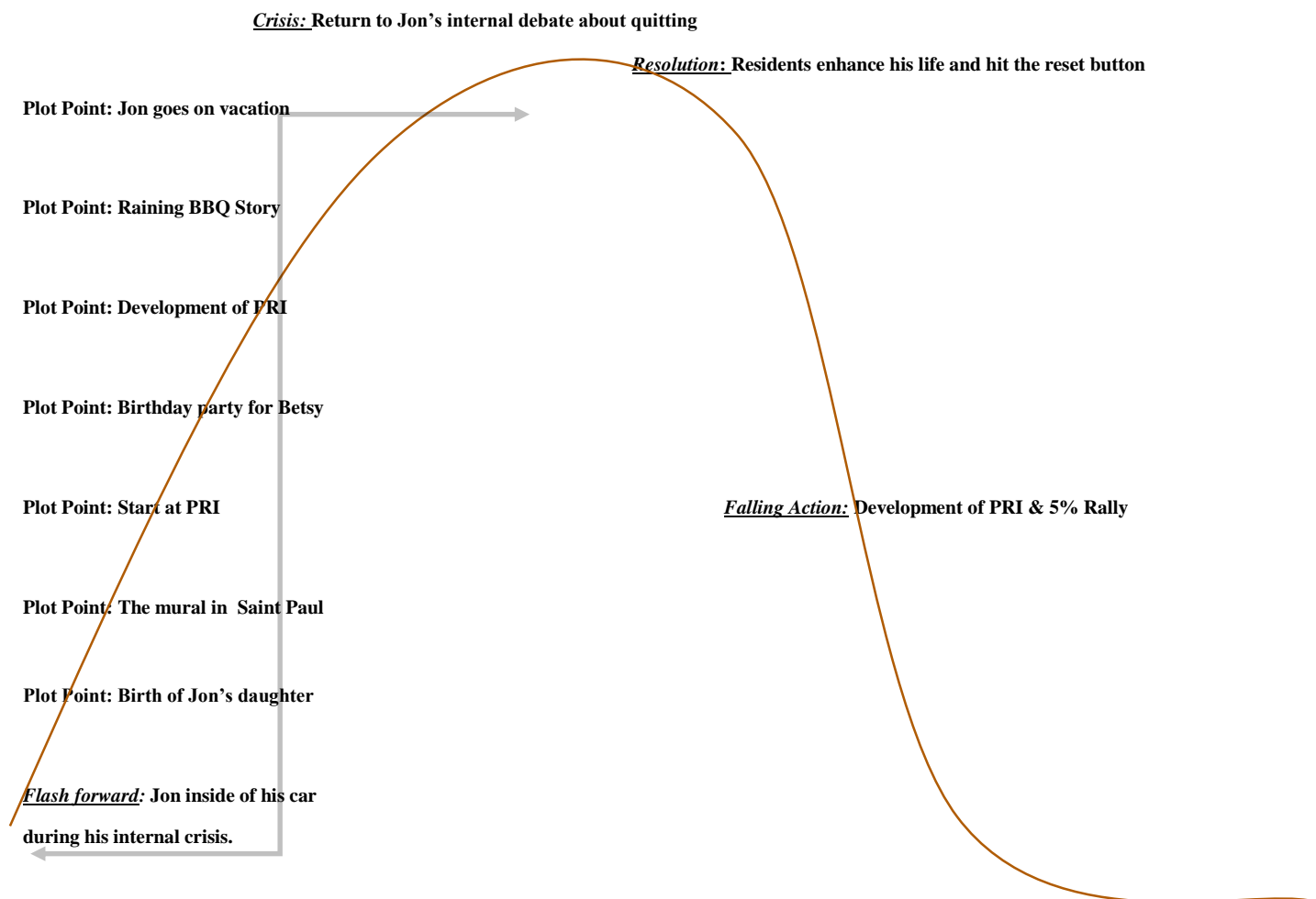
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The Phoenix Widow

Structure:



[Flash forward to very beginning of Crisis]

A distinct appearing man drove down highway I-94 through a frozen-tundraesque environment. A man with white long hair and bright blue eyes. He was slim, but fit from running and handiwork. Jon Colby clutched the worn leather of his car steering wheel. His faded white Toyota with over 350,000 miles on it cruised down the highway. The tires crunched the ice-covered highway, and chunks of ice and snow clattered on his windshield. He crossed the Minnesota/Wisconsin border on highway I-94. A commute to work Jon made thousands of times, over and over. As Jon focused on directing the car over the poor conditioned road, he couldn't help but contemplate the direction of his career.

Lately, Jon contemplated his 28-year career, and the demanding schedule that came with it. He loved the individuals he worked for though. Some of these individuals he knew for over 20 years. He often referred to them as his second family. However, his real family is impacted by the demanding work schedule. What about his grandchildren, children, and wife? Jon hardly had an opportunity to be home. Jon's wife often jokingly referred to herself as, "The Phoenix Widow."

Jon thought that maybe he should step down from his management position. Maybe he should take an overnight position at another group home and exit his 28-year career. He just saw an advertisement online for an overnight position. At least then he would have a set schedule. He wouldn't have to cancel plans with his family anymore. Perhaps, he may just have to cut ties with his second family.

[Plot-point: The birth of Jon's daughter]

In 1978, Jon was at the hospital as he patiently waited to talk to the doctor. His only daughter was just born, and nervousness coated the joy of such a life event. His daughter was born with Down syndrome, and Jon was nervous he wouldn't know *how* to properly raise her. He knew he could do it. If there was anything that he learned from his upbringing, it was self-sacrifice and charity. The Catholic teachers thankfully drilled that into every student.

The doctor walked into the room and flipped through papers on a clipboard. Dr. Randolph looked at a young new father. The doctor was serious, and he didn't have the bright-eyes that a doctor usually has before congratulating someone on the birth of his child.

"Jon, you don't have to bring this baby home. These kind of babies are tough to raise. You can give this child to the state. Don't worry, you can always have more children," The doctor bluntly said.

"That's not even a consideration," Jon responded without any hesitation.

[Exposition: Limited knowledge of persons with disabilities]

Jon and his first-wife decided to raise their newborn daughter. This was a challenge though because their exposure to people with disabilities was very limited. People living with disabilities weren't in the community. There wasn't an opportunity for any interaction. At this point, individuals like his daughter lived in state hospitals.

[Plot-point: Social worker sparking Jon]

Six months later, Jon sat at home and three hard knocks at the front door interrupted him. He opened the door to reveal an unfamiliar woman.

"Hello, Mr. Colby?" The stranger asked.

“That’s me,” Jon responded.

“Hi, I’m from the Dakota County. I would like to make you aware of the services we can provide for your daughter.”

“What? How did you hear about us?”

“Oh, we received your name from the hospital,” The woman replied.

[Exposition: Significance of social worker]

The woman was a social worker from Dakota County, and she was informing families of a new Outreach program for people with physical and/or developmental disabilities. This Outreach program was one of the first alternatives to the state hospitals. The program unveiled a new concept, the concept to provide people, people similar to Jon’s daughter, more residential services.

The interaction lead to very little, but it sparked something for Jon. He knew that there was a community and culture of people that truly cared for individuals with disabilities. Jon wanted to immerse himself into that community. At the very least, he would learn about how to raise his daughter. The new community was out there, but he just didn’t know where it was.

[Exposition: Jon’s divorce]

The search for this new community was on pause while Jon tried to figure other things out. Jon’s daughter had just turned four years old, and his young marriage ended. They were young, and things simply didn’t work out.

In the early 1980s, it was pretty tough for fathers to be granted full custody of their children after a divorce. A divorce often resulted in full custody granted to the mother. The civil court system “granted” Jon one day a week and every other weekend with his daughter. Even

though he wasn't provided a massive amount of time with his daughter, he tried to make every second with her count.

[Exposition: Jon as a photographer]

Two years breezed by, and he had not found that community yet. Sure, he worked at nursing homes providing geriatric care, but that was a much different community than the one he knew existed. His journey took a detour, but he continued to be a big part of his daughter's life.

He lived at a studio apartment, located in downtown Saint Paul. Jon worked as a photographer and did freelance work. He was artistic, talented, and enjoyed the line of work-- but it didn't put very much food on the table.

[Plot-point: Finding the mural]

Jon trudged his feet along a west-end sidewalk of Saint Paul. He passed a block-long building on Robert Street. The tan brick building held a sign that announced in red paint, "Captain Ken's Foods." From the front of the building, it appeared as just another brick building. He turned the corner onto Colorado Street, he stopped in awe to appreciate the side of this very same building. About a 10-foot tall mural glazed over the tan bricks. The mural wasn't colorful or glowing. It was painted simply with shades of black and white. The mural contained a realistic-styled scene of people in a variety of poses lending their hands to people with disabilities. It was beautiful to Jon, in more ways than one. Who painted this? The community is



Captain Ken's Foods PRI: Mural

growing, but where is it?

A few days later, fate or luck struck him. A neighbor within his apartment complex, an artist, revealed that he and some others had painted the mural. The artist shared with Jon that he had painted it for a non-profit organization called, “Phoenix Residence Inc.” A kind of organization that Jon wanted to be a part of.

Shortly after, Jon noticed a job advertisement in the newspaper for Phoenix Residence Inc. (PRI) that stated: “Seeking Direct Support Professionals.” Essentially, this translated to direct care-givers for this community of people. He applied to the organization and waited for his opportunity.

[Plot point: Jon starts at PRI]

For five long weeks, he called PRI on a weekly basis to plead for an interview. The first four weeks of his effort produced nothing. He called for the fifth week in a row. Jon told the receptionist on the phone plainly, yet directly, “I need to get into this field. I heard about Phoenix, and I want to work there.”

The last phone call led to an interview which inevitably lead to a beloved career. Jon started at PRI in 1984, thinking that this was probably only a six-month to a year stint in his life. He finally found the community, and he was ready to learn.

[Exposition: Birth of PRI]

PRI was located at 135 Colorado Street, Saint Paul, MN. The building deceptively appeared to be a large, bland, and brown building. The building wasn't a great physical representation of the driven, creative minds that resided within it. The individuals who lived and worked there were reshaping the way individuals with disabilities live.

Behind the brick walls, there was a community of people learning to live independently. Many came to PRI straight from MN state institutions with low expectations. The conditions at many of these institutions were awful. Many individuals were confined to their bedrooms with minimal social interaction. The care provided was mostly custodial. These individuals escaped these tough conditions and were provided an *actual home* where they could learn to live independently, even if that meant accepting an offered hand from a Direct Support Professional (DSP). The mentality behind PRI was to provide individuals the opportunity to soar beyond possibilities.

Sure, they were receiving 24-hour nursing services, direct-care, prepared meals, but all of those components could have been fulfilled at an institution. PRI aimed to shatter the entire perception of individuals with physical and developmental disabilities. Where does an organization start when these individuals had been carelessly brushed off and diagnosed with mental illnesses? They started by providing an individual a choice. The individual and his or her family could decide which environment provided the best opportunity to live his or her dream. PRI was one of the options.

[Exposition: Jon's transformation to management]

After a few years of working with PRI, Jon saw who could work in this sort of field. A person must have the desire to make the lives of others better. Someone could not simply be in this to benefit himself. If the person didn't have this quality, he would only go through the motions for a short period of time. There were people that didn't quite have this quality and simply ended up finding something else that better suited their personality.

The individuals he worked for were great, the long-list of duties were manageable, but just like any job— he learned to swallow his pride in order to continue to create win-win

situations with co-workers. Unintentionally, he became a model employee. He found himself in situations where he mediated conflicts between other co-workers. Co-workers looked at Jon as a leader. Other staff members encouraged him to work his way into a management role.

Hesitantly, he accepted the encouragement and became a manager at PRI.

[PRI Contributing to Jon's daughter]

Jon envisioned PRI as a place to gain knowledge in order to better raise his daughter. He didn't know *how* it would contribute, but how could it hurt? The years of experience did in fact help Jon, but not in a concrete sense.

Every single individual he worked for was unique. After years of experience, Jon realized that there wasn't one particular method to raise or assist anyone. Everyone is an individual—whether the person has a disability or not. However, Jon did gain a subconscious understanding of people with developmental and physical disabilities. The daily interaction with individuals similar to his daughter developed this understanding. As a result, he felt that he was able to communicate better with his daughter. Every day at PRI quietly increased that understanding for Jon.

[Exposition: Introduction to birthday party]

It was typical day at 103 Colorado Street. Typical to some, but it was special for one individual who lived there. She moved to PRI from Cambridge (which was a state institution in Minnesota). Her name was Betsy. She was an individual with Down syndrome, and Betsy was non-verbal. On that day though, it was Betsy's birthday. To many, it appeared Betsy didn't have a whole lot of activity within her mind. Years of negligence and lack of independent encouragement led many individuals to appear this way.

[Plot-point: Birthday party]

Jon brought Betsy's birthday cake into the PRI community hall. It was large circular room. The residents' bedroom doors surrounded the walls of the community hall. During mealtimes it served as the cafeteria. Outside of mealtimes, the room was utilized for social gatherings and activities.

Three staff members and four residents gathered around Betsy to wish her a happy birthday. The birthday candles filled the air with smoke. The staff members were about to sing "Happy Birthday," but mostly for the benefit of the other residents. Everyone thought that Betsy wouldn't have a reaction to any of it. Jon thought to himself, "This poor lady. There's no way that she's going to get anything out of this."

As the variety of voices began to sing, something amazing happened. A singular shriek of laughter filled the community hall. That laughter came from Betsy. She flailed her arms in the air and continued to laugh with joy. Nobody expected her to have any reaction at all. A huge grin formed across Jon's face.

This non-responsive individual was completely misinterpreted. The event sparked an epiphany for many: non-responsive individuals often have a fully functional personality within them.

[Exposition: Developments for PRI, breaking off into different homes]

Years of experience at PRI were notched into Jon's belt. He remembered so many great memories that morphed his personality. As PRI continued to mature, Jon matured as well.

New proposals from ARRM (Association of Residential Resources in Minnesota) boomed in the late 1980s. The proposals prompted Phoenix to look into the future. A new

concept caught on that suggested large facilities to branch into separate group homes. Initially, PRI resisted this idea. At the time, the organization felt a necessity for one building. They felt that the community established would be tarnished if they separated everyone.

Shortly after the initial resistance, PRI realized that this was the direction the industry was going, and it was time to jump on the wagon. Slowly, the organization branched away from the one-building community. In the early 1990s, an apartment and several group homes opened. In the early 2000s, PRI launched a plan to open eight more group homes.

During the development and expansion of PRI, Jon remarried to a woman named Kathleen in 2001. She actually lived in California prior to their marriage. They had met on an online dating site and hit it off quite well. Before long, Jon and Kathleen lived in Wisconsin together happily married. Jon would often tell staff members a trick to treating one's wife the proper way. Even after they were married, he often referred to Kathleen as his "girlfriend."

"I refer to my wife as my girlfriend because I treat her like a girlfriend. It's a lot easier for someone to take his wife for granted."

From 2003-2005, PRI built the promised homes, and the organization branched out to 18 different locations. Four to six individuals lived at each of these group homes. Jon didn't slow down and ended up working as a Program Manager at one of the homes that was established in 2005.

[Exposition Barbeque at Jon's farm]

An annual tradition began where all of the residents at Jon's group home attended a barbeque at his hobby farm. Often, residents from other PRI group homes would also make an appearance. Every summer the residents looked forward to the event.

Llamas, chickens, and goats roamed all around the farm. Many of the residents enjoyed the opportunity to pet and play with the animals. Others came for the socialization and the delicious barbeque food.

Around 2008, the annual barbeque kept getting held off and rescheduled due to poor weather conditions. Whether rain or shine, Jon and Kathleen decided they were going to hold the barbeque on a particular date. Well, Mother Nature decided to rain on this particular annual barbeque.

[Plot Point: Annual barbeque]

The vans pulled up to Jon's farm. The rain pounded onto the metal roofs of the PRI vans. The residents were bundled up in their raincoats. The rain didn't let up, and the only solution was for all of the residents to huddle within Jon's garage. It seemed to be a disaster to Jon.

Residents who needed to go to the bathroom found themselves in an odd predicament. The residents who had to pee used a portable urinal in the corner of the garage. These urinals were similar to the kind that male patients used in hospitals. It was a wide-open area that everyone could see, so the staff members had to come up with something in order to provide privacy. One staff member assisted the resident with the urinal. Another staff member would hold up a bed sheet over the designated corner of the garage. At least this way, the sheet blocked everyone else from seeing the exposed resident.

The rain didn't die down, and this year's barbeque seemed to be a disaster to Jon. He thought to himself, "Oh man, these poor guys."

Jon was fixated on all of the uncontrollable negative factors that affected the barbeque, but he didn't notice how much fun the residents were having. All of the residents talked positively about this particular barbeque for years. They enjoyed themselves regardless of the rain and chaos. They were just happy to enjoy some good food and socialize with their friends. The efforts of Jon, regardless of the weather conditions, made a positive impact on the residents' lives. It was a memory they would hold onto, and that is all that mattered to Jon.

[Exposition: Jon's Program Manager Position]

The new salary-based and flexible scheduled position would prove to not be the most advantageous position in the world. The position entailed budgeting, scheduling, interviewing DSP's, coordinating appointments, providing direct care when needed, and many other aspects that a middle-management position typically held. However, the job duties were not what contributed to Jon's wife considering herself the "Phoenix Widow." It was Jon's dedication to the individuals that lived there. He knew most of the individuals for decades, and this was far more than a job to him. He considered this group home *his home too*. He often greeted DSP's upon arrival at the group home with a, "Welcome home!"

[Exposition: Description of group home]

Jon's group home was located on the outskirts of Saint Paul. The location didn't have the urban feel that most of Saint Paul did. It had a very rural feel to it. Often, raccoons, deer, turkeys, and other wildlife scurried around the group home at night. The home stood upon a steep hill that overlooked a major highway. Right beyond the major highway, there was a busy train yard and a large industrial plant. Train whistles blew loudly about every hour, but far enough away for the

group home to remain peaceful. The smell of burning sulfur from the plant often lingered around the outside air. PRI built this house in front of train yard because one of the residents absolutely loved trains. During the summer and spring, this resident sat outside and watched the trains slowly chug by for hours.

Tan vinyl siding plated the outside of the house. The van resided within the attached garage. The one-story building was nothing extravagant, but it was a beautiful home for these residents. For such a young house, it contained many memories of laughter and joy.

[Plot Point: Jon's going on vacation]

One could imagine that Jon accumulated an abundance of vacation hours while working decades at PRI. Vacation hours that he really didn't use. That is, until upper-management would essentially force him to at the end of each year.

The old white Toyota climbed up the steep driveway. The car doors thudded shut, and the engine was silenced. Jon and Kathleen walked into the group home. Framed portrait photographs of all of the residents covered the hallway walls. The pictures smiled at the visitors and employees of the home.

Jon and Kathleen came to inform the DSP's of their upcoming vacation. There were many vacations in the past where Jon couldn't help from keeping his work cell phone turned on. He enjoyed time with his lovely wife and family, but he always wanted to make himself available. He seemed to want to always know if anything out of the ordinary was going on at the group home. Although he enjoyed his vacations and politely cautioned staff to contact the on-call manager, he always kept his cell phone on. Jon would answer it immediately if someone did call him. Kathleen wanted to assure that their vacation would in fact be a vacation.

Jon and Kathleen stood in the living room. Beams of sunlight brightened the room through the spaces between the blinds. Three DSP's met them in the living room. Kathleen looked at the staff with her long brunette hair and a playful smile, but seemed to have something important to say, "Jon and I are going to be driving to California tomorrow. Starting today, Ken is the on-call manager until December 6th. Guys, who are you going to call if you need a manager?"

"Ken," the staff stated simultaneously.

"Okay, so please: DO NOT call Jon," Jon's wife reiterated with a playful, yet stern tone.

Kathleen was a very kind lady, and she wasn't there to be rude or mean. She simply understood Jon's dedication to PRI. Even though Jon told the staff a week ago about the vacation, she probably knew that Jon would still answer his cell phone if someone slipped up and called him. Many other managers didn't even answer their phones when they *were* on-call.

Jon would often make guest appearances at the group home when he was *off-call*, and it was most likely his first full-day off in two or three weeks. Some would say, he just couldn't get enough of Phoenix.

The message was delivered clear to the employees, and Jon made his way to the back bedrooms of the home to let the residents know he was leaving for vacation. He said his temporary goodbyes to all of his friends, but continually got caught up with helping them out with a variety of tasks. Whatever the circumstances, Jon always had time for the residents. After about twenty minutes, Kathleen had to encourage him to wrap things up. They had a long cross-country drive ahead of them.

[Return to Crisis: Jon driving to work]

The old Toyota that Jon had been driving for decades rattled up the steep driveway. He looked at the group home, a home he often referred to as his own. He had dark rings under his eyes, he had slept for two hours in the past 48 hours. After a long sigh, he composed himself though and put on his usual positive demeanor. He walked into the home ready to work for the individuals he loved and knew for over 25 years. Jon's blue eyes beamed with optimism, and his tired state was disguised with his energetic personality.

Jon sat down in his office. The walls scattered with photographs of all of the friends he had worked for through the past 28 years. Jon was exhausted, and he needed to go home and sleep after he completed charting. He had been working 16 hour shifts the last two days because one of the overnight staff members had recently quit. It was Friday, and Jon would finally be able to catch up on some sleep tonight. The office chair squeaked beneath Jon as he frantically documented on the computer. He was trying to catch up on some work, so that he could get a full-night of sleep.

A staff member knocked on Jon's office door and interrupted his charting, "Jon, the phone is for you."

The energetic, positive demeanor faded from his face. He was afraid someone was calling in sick. He needed sleep, and he was concerned that he wasn't going to be able to get it.

After receiving the phone-call, Jon realized that his suspicion was dead-on. He rushed to the back of the group home and plead to the DSP's for some help. Frustration seeped out of his usual smiling face. The severe exhaustion had worn out his usual efforts of concealing his *actual* energy level. Jon held the responsibility of covering any shifts that weren't covered by the

DSP's. With such short notice, it was improbable that anyone else would work the overnight shift.

“Kelly is calling in sick tonight. I guess she has food poisoning or something. I've slept for 2 hours in the past 2 days. Can anyone please stay late tonight, so that I can at least go home and sleep before I have to work the overnight shift?” Jon pleaded to two of the DSP's working that evening.

A DSP replied, “How late would you want me to stay?”

“Anything helps. Even if I could sleep for two hours,” Jon answered with desperation.

“I can stay until around 1 AM or midnight,” The female DSP responded.

“Thank you so much. I appreciate it! I just need to get some sleep,” Jon responded with sincere gratitude.

Jon rushed out of the group home to drive all the way back to Wisconsin and finally get some sleep. Although Jon was relieved to be able to go home for a moment, the unpredictability of his job still clouded his life.

[Jon's internal thoughts of Conflict]

Internally, Jon contemplated the idea of trying to find a set-scheduled DSP position. The unpredictable schedule for a Program Manager isn't the best for making plans with his family. He constantly was forced to cancel plans with his children, grandchildren, friends, and wife. He regrettably told them, “I'm sorry. I have to work again, and that's just the way it is.”

The responsibilities are very demanding, and the job never seems complete. If someone called in or quit, it was the manager's responsibility to be at the group home working for the

person. The constant turnover rate added a lot of chaos for a Program Manager. The one-on-one moments with the residents were very minimal at this point. If Jon could tell himself one thing years ago, it would be, “Stick with the direct care.”

Fogged by exhaustion and frustration, Jon considered getting another job. He knew his wife was joking about being a “Phoenix Widow,” but the context behind the joke was fairly realistic.

[Climax: Jon’s mindset shifting]

During the midst of Jon’s thoughts, he remembered all the benefits of working at PRI. Each resident at the home made Jon’s life easier. If Jon was having a bad day, a resident could instantly hit his “reset button.” The resident could crack a joke (inappropriate or not), and all of Jon’s worries melted away. However, it’s wasn’t always a joke that triggered the reset button. Something as simple as taking a resident to the library can do the trick. If it brought joy to the resident’s life, it made Jon feel amazing. To see the residents’ faces light up with excitement was a hard feeling to describe. The emotional paycheck was hard to put a price on. He couldn’t leave his second family yet. He still saw his daughter every Thursday after work. His weekends off didn’t *always* turn into something unexpected.

All of the stress and worries faded away. He couldn’t leave this job. Jon and his family understood that their relationship had to take a backseat to this job. Sure, this field felt like a cartoon with all of the hilarious personalities and inappropriate jokes, but that’s not what made the job special though. That was just one small benefit. Jon was honored to be able to see clients through 25 years of their lives. Jon saw individuals he loved cry, laugh, smile, and pass away. He learned from it all, and this experience helped him raise his daughter in a similar situation. It all

built an understanding of people, and positively contributed to his family every day. All of it was an honor for Jon. He wouldn't leave his friends yet. He needed them, and they needed him.

Maybe Jon's wife will just have to be a "Phoenix Widow" for a little bit longer.

[Falling Action: The future of PRI]

PRI was founded through the vision of promoting individuals to grow. The organization has continued to promote new skills that help employees gain a deeper understanding of the people they support. A concept that always has been behind PRI is: "Person Centered Thinking." A concept that contributes to understanding the needs and wants of supported individuals.

Although PRI continues to directly implement skills and tools to enhance individuals' lives, another person is in mind: the Direct Support Professional. These are the employees that are constantly involved in the face-to-face interaction with the individuals. These employees are responsible for cooking, housekeeping of the entire house, passing medication, providing hands-on direct care, transporting/planning resident outings, and the list goes on.

The job is emotionally rewarding job, but a very demanding one. DSP's, who are working for non-profit organizations, haven't had a wage adjustment since 2008. PRI and similar non-profit organizations cannot provide a wage increase without some assistance. With all of the other expenses, there must be an excess in the budget to accomplish this. Gaining a cost of living adjustment (COLA) is a huge goal for PRI.

Jon believes that DSP's deserve to make at least \$15 to \$20 an hour. DSP's under compensation causes turnover rates to continue to be an issue. Many DSP's are working multiple part-time jobs to support themselves, or they are concurrently attending school in order to

acquire a higher paid job in the future. If DSP's were paid at a more comfortable rate, the turnover would slow down. More well-suited employees could potentially make a career in this field. The supported individuals rely and hope for consistent, high-quality care from DSP's. The DSP's are seeing the supported individuals at their most vulnerable and revealing states. Individuals that can't change and bath on their own rely heavily on others. It has to be really difficult to adjust to new DSP's constantly. Often, these individuals do not hold any secrets from anyone. Everything is out in the open for them. Wouldn't it be nice if they could at least keep their secrets between DSP's that they had known for years?

[5% Rally at the Capitol]

On a winter day in 2013, the Minnesota State Capitol was filled with positive energy. The poor weather conditions didn't stop employees and clients from gathering in the famous rotunda room for the "5% Rally." The "5% Rally" requested that state legislature provide DSP's with a COLA (cost of living adjustment). DSP's and clients from all over Minnesota gathered there to rally behind 5% Representatives. Phoenix Residence Inc. was one of the non-profit organizations gathered in the rotunda room that day.



A sea of blue shirts covered the rotunda room. A blue dress-code was the agreed upon symbol for the 5% Rally. Jon Colby was in the center of the crowd sporting his light-blue, PRI t-shirt. His hands rested on the handles of a client's wheelchair. He listened intently and seemed concerned about the future of his industry. The crowd was cheering loudly and getting behind the representative speakers.

“What do want?”

The crowd held up one hand simultaneously and roared back, “5%!”

“When do we want it?”

“Now!”

The halls of the capitol rumbled with passionate chants. Jon threw his hand up to the rhythm of the 5% chant. A smile cemented over his face, while he cheered for a better future for his second family.

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