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The day Brandy and Ian moved into Hope Place, Richard, by then 37, had nowhere to live. He worked his shift, met Brandy afterward, then walked to a church near the construction site to camp out for the evening. He curled up in a sleeping bag, but it offered little protection from the rain. Drenched, he barely slept at all.

When Francisco Mitchell, Richard's work buddy, showed up the next day, he noticed Richard looked a little rough around the edges. He asked why.

I'm homeless, Richard said.

Francisco could relate. Not long after meeting Richard the year before, Francisco had spent nights in a shelter. If a friend hadn't rented him a room in an apartment in Everett, 30 miles north of Seattle, who knew where he'd be now.

You can come stay with me, Francisco said.

Cool, Richard said.

And like that, a skinhead and a biracial man became roommates.

One day, two police officers showed up at Hope Place to talk to Brandy. Richard had missed a court date for a domestic violence review. Had she seen Richard James Duncan? No, she said. Did she know where he was? No.

On one level, her answers were lies, but on another, they were part of a strategy. If she told police Richard worked three blocks away, he'd become angry, and he'd be arrested. When he got of jail, he'd be even more angry. Lying was her way to stay safe.

Brandy and Ian ate lunch with Richard almost every workday. On weekends, she and Ian would venture to Everett to hang out. Because of the no-contact order, they kept their meetings quiet. Because Richard had missed the court date, the court had issued a \$25,000 warrant for his arrest. Richard knew the police would catch him, one day.

During the week, Richard and Francisco followed a routine. "We just drank a couple beers after work," remembers Francisco, "because we had to get up early in the morning." Taking buses to and from Everett, they endured long commutes, sometimes two hours each way. "It sucked," says Richard.

But not for long. Francisco's original roommate got a new job that required he move and give up the Everett apartment. Francisco and Richard needed to find somewhere new. With the long commute, Francisco wanted to live closer to work, so he asked his boss for ideas. His boss talked to someone who owned an apartment building in Seattle. Yes, there was a two-bedroom opening up close to work. Actually, it was in the gray building right across the street from the Station at Othello Park.

Francisco jumped at it. So did Richard, who'd be his roomie. But Richard had a long felony record from Nevada, so the landlord wouldn't put Richard's name on the lease. They needed someone else: Brandy.

Richard pitched the idea. We'll all be together, he said, and you can leave Hope Place. "It sounded good, in theory," Brandy recalls. But live together again? Doubts consumed her. Richard convinced her the violence would be over. She signed her name. On March 1, 2010, Brandy, Richard, Ian and Francisco moved into 4222 S. Othello St., into Apartment 21.

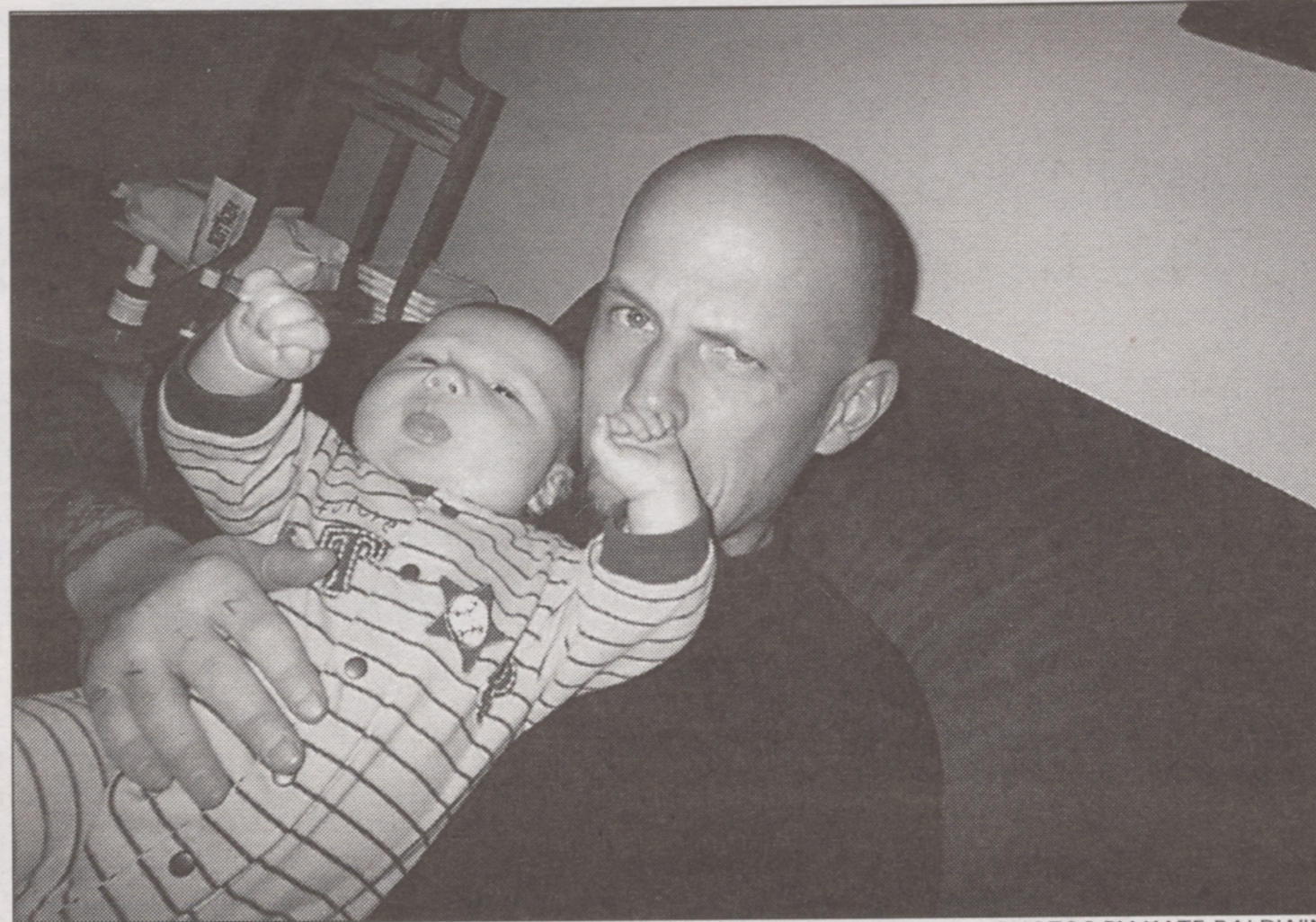
Within two months, their attempt at a happy home life would come to an end.

Apartment 21

In the apartment, March came in like a lamb and stayed that way. For a while.

The front door opened onto a hallway with a bedroom to the left — that's where Brandy, Richard and Ian stayed — and a bathroom. The hall turned right, with another bedroom on the left, for Francisco, before leading to the living room. Off to the right, the kitchen. A wall jack provided Internet but no phone service.

Richard and Francisco left for work by 6 a.m. Along with caring for the five-month-old



PHOTOS BY KATE BALDWIN

Ian, Brandy handled domestic duties. Sometimes Richard came home for lunch. Around 5 p.m., he and Francisco returned. Brandy cooked.

Some evenings, Richard would hold Ian on his lap, dancing his infant body to "The Gummy Bear Song," a short, animated YouTube video of a singing, break-dancing neon green piece of candy. Richard and Francisco read copies of "WWII History," a magazine extolling the German military. On nice days, Brandy strolled Ian around a nearby park. A calm home life. But around the end of March, the internal climate changed.

The drinking seemed to shift it. True, Richard and Brandy had drunk before, but Francisco noticed that, more and more, their drinking led to arguments. He might have a lady friend over, and Brandy and Richard would bicker "over little things and for nothing," Francisco recalls. At least Richard never hit Brandy, not that he saw.

But storms brewed in their bedroom. Richard threw things at Brandy: books, shoes, diaper boxes. It didn't matter. Brandy, feeling mother bear energy, fought back. She had a kid to protect. Though she was nowhere near as strong as Richard, Brandy hit and punched him. The thought of being intimate held little interest for her, so she created a barrier to the bedroom: "I locked him out." But Richard worked at a construction site, so he borrowed tools

removed the doorknob. She still wouldn't let him touch her.

As April progressed, the situation deteriorated. Drinking every day. Yelling every day. Fighting every day. No one saw a way out. Brandy and Francisco had signed a lease, and Richard and Francisco had to cover the \$1,050 rent, plus finish paying the security deposit. Everyone had to pitch in. Brandy, for her part, dreamed of taking Ian and leaving Richard.

Not having extra cash stifled that dream, though she knew Richard kept rent money in a drawer in the living room. One day she took some money and stayed with Ian in a motel room for the night. She called a shelter to ask if it had space. A staff member told her yes, but it was so far away, Brandy worried she'd feel isolated. So the next day, she returned to Apartment 21. She figured if she left and Richard found her, she'd be pulled into the middle of another violent confrontation. And that was something she didn't want to imagine.

Middle man

As Francisco sat in a seedy, downtown restaurant-bar on April 29, 2010, he found himself in the middle of another situation.

This feeling of being caught in the middle grew out of his youth. With one Mexican and one white parent, young Francisco

All the arguing, the yelling, the hitting at Tent City 3, in the Georgian Motel, at Way Back Inn. For weeks, months, 16 long months, she'd been telling herself she'd leave him, go somewhere, anywhere. But when would she do it?

When?

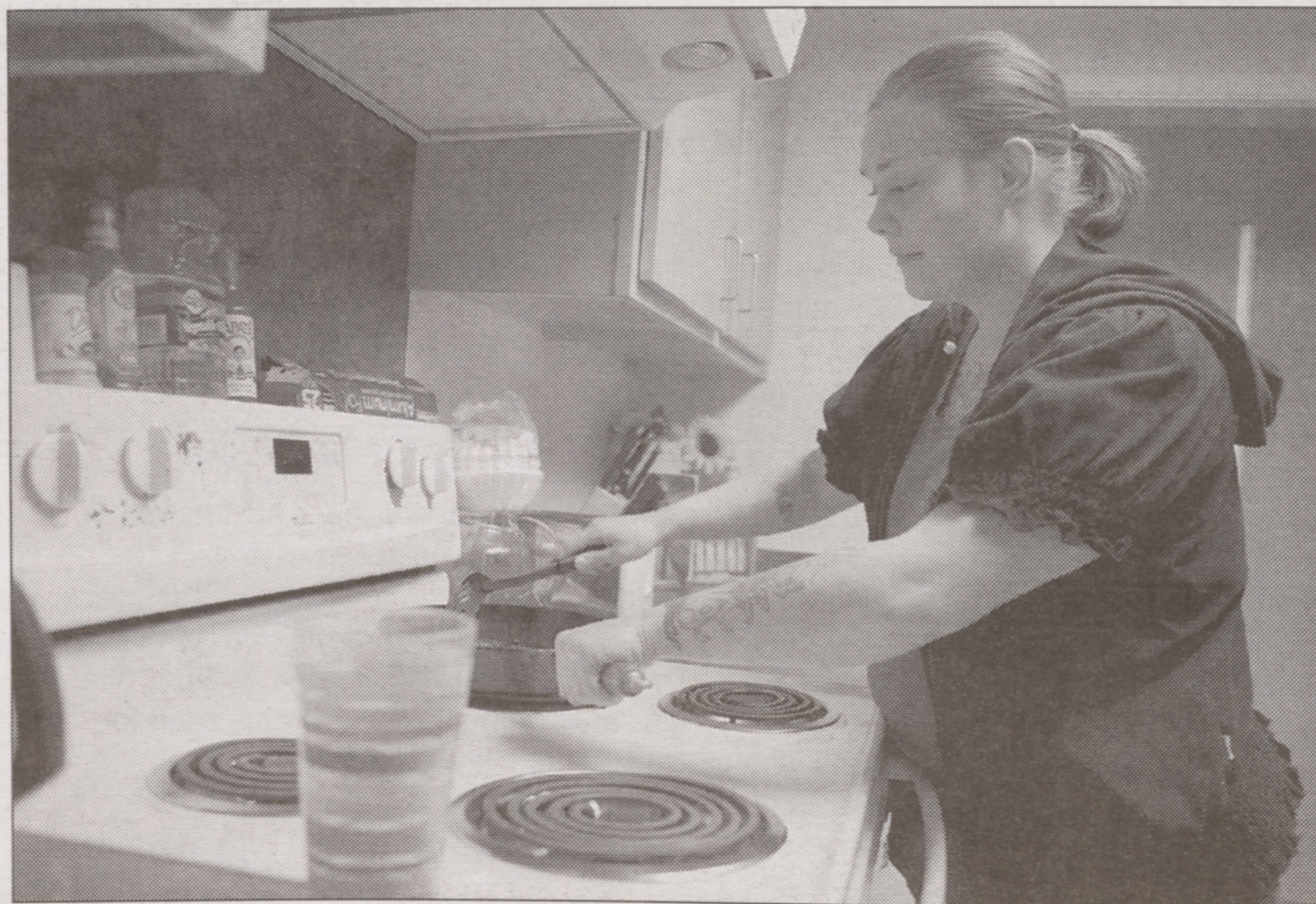
Tonight. Now.

I don't want to be with you anymore, Brandy said. I want to go home, back to Idaho.

There's the door, Richard said.

I need money for a bus ticket for Ian and me.

No, Richard said.



Chavez Mitchell spent his childhood in Southern California caught between Mexicanos and Anglos. The middle ground became more troubling when, at six, his father died. His mother remarried, and Francisco's stepdad abused her. Unable to stop the violence as a youth, Francisco swore, when he grew up, he would never hit a woman or allow another man to, either.

But as a young adult, he had other woes: Cocaine and crack addiction led to an assault with a deadly weapon charge. He landed in the California Institution for Men.

Inside, inmates drew clear divisions along racial lines. White, black, Mexican, and within these groups, even more subdivisions. Not declaring your allegiance to one group left you a target. "They do a lot of bad things to you," he remembers.

Because Francisco wasn't 100 percent Mexican, he couldn't run with them. Same with the whites. He fell in with the Chicanos, U.S. citizens of Mexican descent.

Since the Chicanos tended to speak English, the white supremacists mostly left them alone. A few even befriended Francisco. One told him he'd only joined for protection. When Francisco left prison, he ran into the guy, and they hung out, became friends. It taught Francisco that someone's tattoos or actions on the inside didn't predict how the person would behave on the outside.

And Francisco wanted to be a better person on the outside, so after rehab in Cali, he wound his way to Seattle. He worked as a bilingual translator for a while, finally landing at TLC. He remembered that at a job site in February 2009, a new guy, white, showed up. Along with a shaved head and scraggly beard, the white guy had, tattooed near his left eye, a pair of S-shaped lightning bolts for "SS," Hitler's elite defense corps. Spelled out on the upper portions of his fingers, another tattoo read "SKINHEAD." The guy, Richard, and Francisco talked. Both had spent times in shelters. As for the tattoos: so what? "There was no Mexican, no white, no white supremacy: just a couple of homeless (guys), striving for life, looking for work, making money."

To Francisco's Mexican friends, however, the tattoos mattered. They wanted answers. ¿Ese es tu amigo? That's your friend? Sí. Yeah.

Pero el es blanco, el es racista. But he's white, he's a white supremacist. Síííí... Yeaaaahhhh...

¿Como es que ustedes son buenos amigos? How come you guys are good friends?

Bueno nosotros trabajamos juntos, es todo. We'll, we're working together, that's all.

Even with Richard's other tattoos — the palm-sized, blue-green swastika on one pec, the line drawing of Hitler on the other — Richard never gave Francisco any trouble. They shared deep secrets that Francisco never divulged. Their friendship grew tighter.

Except now, in the apartment, he watched Richard and Brandy drink and argue. On the one hand, their private life was their business. But on the other, their private life spilled over into the apartment, which made it his business, too. Again, he felt in the middle, unsure whether to say something or shut up.

He only wanted peace and quiet, both of which were in short supply at the apartment. So even though he had to work early the next day, Francisco decided he'd go home in a bit. Right after he had another beer.

Something bad

By the time someone knocked on the door of Apartment 21 on April 29, Brandy and Richard had already downed a couple beers. It was a neighbor down the hall, inviting them over. Richard picked Ian up, and they headed to the neighbor's place. People were there, including a guy

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