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VENDOR PROFILE

Amber Dunks

BY LEONORA KO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Amber Dunks sits down for her interview, she is clearly exhausted. She explains that while her fiancé has a job, he returns late, and last night they had a difficult time finding a safe spot to sleep on the street.

"When I got there at 11:20, it was really quiet; it was like a ghost town. So we were wondering, did people get swept or are (the police) coming back through?"

Amber didn't always have street smarts. She had limited exposure to the homeless as a volunteer receptionist at the South Coast Gospel Mission in Coos Bay.

"Never really got to know them," she says. "I went in, did my job, maybe said 'hi' every once in a while — that was it. And then all of a sudden I got here to Portland and I was one."

When she was first homeless, Amber holed up in a tent with her box of books at the rest area, Right 2 Dream Too. Then Ibrahim Mubarak, the co-founder of Right 2 Dream Too, invited her to join the 2012 protest march on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

"I'd never been involved in protesting, activism, anything. After that, I was on fire," says Amber.

"If you don't like the way things are, you can do something about it yourself, instead of waiting for somebody else."

"That was the most awesome revelation that I've ever had in my life."

Now Amber has a lot to say about

homelessness: "It seems like people on the streets have more problems than people that are housed, but that's not necessarily the case. The houseless community — their problems are all out on Front Street because they don't have four walls they can hide in and take care of those problems away from the rest of the world."

Amber also explains the difference between homeless and houseless: "People say home is where the heart is. Whether it be Right 2 Dream Too, a shelter, a doorway, under a bridge — you make the best of it, and that is actually your home; that is where you're living. So we're not really lacking a home as long as we have that sense of community within ourselves. What we're lacking is housing."

In addition to selling Street Roots with her fiancé at the Safeway near Lloyd Center, Amber has been deeply involved as an advocate for houseless rights. She has been a board member at Right 2 Dream Too, a secretary at Right 2 Survive, a testifier for the Homeless Bill of Rights Coalition in Salem, and a liaison for women experiencing domestic violence. She has gained skills in grant writing, conflict resolution, public speaking and event planning.

"If you actually get involved instead of just sitting there,

you can learn so much that you can put on your resume," she says.

In order to deal with recent losses in her family and health issues, Amber has taken a break from some of her community work to focus on what she needs.

"I want what everyone else wants," says Amber. "To be normal, to be married, to have a family. To be housed, to have a good job — hopefully a job helping people."

To that end, Amber will be applying for financial aid to go to school and hopes to have a full-time job to save up for an apartment.

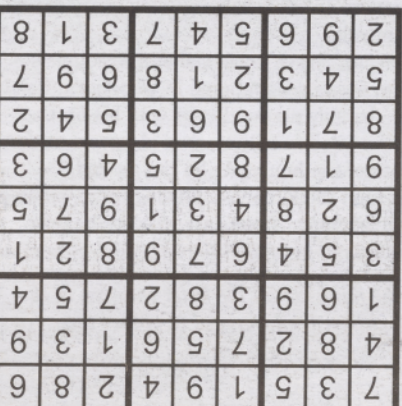
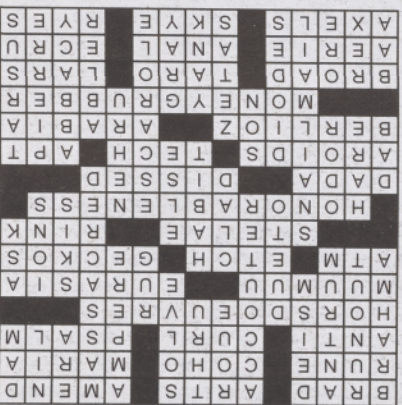
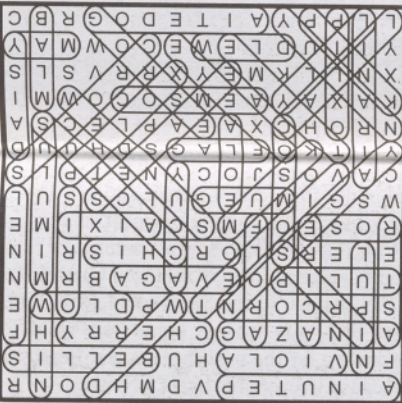
Amber sums up her experience by saying: "I'm not going to say I'm happy to be houseless. But I will say once this part of my journey is over, when I look back on it, I will never be sorry that this

happened to me because I would not be the person that I'm turning into.

"I got lucky to fall in with a group of people that knew how to advocate for themselves and wanted something better."



Answers to puzzles on page 15



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