

There’s No Place Like Home

From immigrants to the unhoused, everyone deserves a home to come back to

As a child I quickly learned from my father the importance of having a place to call home. He made our modest home in Sunland, an extremely small California town with one junior high and one high school. There my siblings and I grew up, never leaving until we went to college. He grew up in several homes located in several states, and I understand my father’s need for stability. He was also a preachy, philosophical World War II veteran who often stressed that no matter where we wandered and explored, having family and a home to come back to was all we truly needed to live a fulfilling life. Being the sponsor of two Salvadoran asylum seekers for nearly four years now, has given me an even stronger understanding of what having a home means. As I have written in previous *Eugene Weekly* columns, Luisa and Lola (not their real names) arrived in Eugene by leaving their home country, their families and their friends behind and walking through several countries to get here. Why did they leave and what were they seeking? Luisa and Lola chose to leave El Salvador because it

was and is a country ripe with gangs and violence, particularly against women. They each have their story about why they had to leave. And what they sought and what they have worked towards these past four years center around safety and having a home. This desire and need for a home appears everywhere in Eugene. People may be annoyed by all the tents popping up on our vacant lots and parking strips, under trees and behind bushes, but really all anyone wants is a place to rest, to be safe, to be protected from the weather. To be “homeless” is, I believe, one of the worst things that can happen to someone. Conestoga shelters, tiny houses and low income rentals need to continually be built, because really no matter life’s often unexpected circumstances, everyone deserves to have a home. Luisa and Lola have been living in a trailer donated by Oregon Community Asylum Network (OCAN). With their work permits secured, they have constantly worked at this job and that job until finally they have good-paying jobs with full benefits. They often work more than 40 hours a week. I have never seen anyone work as hard as they do.

And why are they working so hard? They want to save money so they can have a safe life with a cozy, affordable home and to possibly bring Lola’s daughters here to live with them. Yes, like my father told me, family is important. With the help of a friend of mine, we found Luisa and Lola their home — a small, cozy one-bedroom affordable rental with a second attic bedroom for the daughters at an affordable price. Luisa and Lola moved in at the beginning of March and are beyond happy. Their happiness is truly my happiness. They know they are family to me and my home is also their home. As Luisa shared with me as we sat on their couch, “I came here with only a small day pack and the clothes I was wearing. Now I can hardly believe I have my own home.” I am reminded of the ending of *The Wizard of Oz* where Dorothy’s adventures end with the gift of her ruby slippers. She clicks her heels together and says, “There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home.”

Victoria Koch has been an asylum seeker sponsor for two Salvadoran asylum seekers for four years. Oregon Community Asylum Network (OCAN) has brought over 30 asylum seekers to Eugene, helping them find jobs, places to live and assisting them in establishing their lives here.



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