

Refuge:

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realized the pain she was causing other people, including her parents, she said.

"It was the gift of desperation," she said.

She began wanting passionately to live, she said, and she knew that her life, as it was, would lead to a quick death.

With the help of others, she was able to give up her addictions, and she now reports "feeling amazing." Also, she has a job, as she works for Amazon, and she is studying business management online at Brigham Young University-Idaho.

Volunteering to the warming station is part of her effort to give back to the community, she said. In addition, as she rebuilds her own life, she has sought to make amends for the damage she has done to other people. One example of this restitution, she said, came when she recently visited Walgreens in Kennewick. There, she spoke with the store's manager and apologized for stealing, she said.

The experience of asking forgiveness and having her apologies accepted is "freeing," she said. Now unburdened by the guilt of past wrongdoing, she said she



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Hermiston Warming Station volunteer Sierra Gilman answers the door to the warming station Saturday, Jan. 8, 2021, during check-in.

feels better able to continue forward with a better life in which she communicates her past struggles with others.

Speaking with others in person, as well as on her Facebook page, she tells people about the joy she feels in sobriety.

"I have not had a bad day since getting sober," she said.

Becoming homeless

As Seth Hall, 51 of Hermiston, discussed his experiences he mentioned the causes for his homelessness. He was at the warming station on Jan. 8. A part-time

janitor, he works 20 hours a week, but he said he does not have enough money to pay rent and child support.

He was able to afford his own home, when he was employed as a forklift driver. He said he lost recent jobs, however, when one company closed. He was released from another job, he said, after too many missed days of being ill.

Hall said he is trying to get a better job to pay for a home, but this process is not as easy as many people think. He applies for jobs, he said, but he does not receive inter-

views; he does not even get calls back from prospective employers.

Life is not like one sees on the news, he said. Often, he sees reports of labor shortages and employers who are desperate to hire new workers. Still, he remains unemployed, and he expressed disappointment that he cannot find better work.

These days, he bounces back and forth between this warming station and a second station, in the old Sears building in Hermiston, which is open during the day. He continues to apply for work,

he said, while hoping for a better future.

Waiting for rescue

Marie Gonzalez, 57 of Hermiston, is in a similar situation as Hall. She, too, travels from the two Hermiston stations each day.

Family troubles forced her out of her Hermiston home originally, and she moved to Lexington with her daughter. She said she had to leave Lexington, though, to be closer to medical services. The problem now, she said, is she does not have a home in Hermiston, which is why she stays at one station at night and another one during the day.

"It's a blessing," she said of the services that have kept her from having to sleep on the street. She expressed gratitude to the community for the space to live while she waits "for rescue." Soon, she said, she will reach out to her daughters to help her, and she believes one will end her homelessness.

She said she is worried, though, about her medical condition. According to Gonzalez, she has diabetes, which can make her faint. She needs insulin, and she is staying off her disease with fruit and granola bars.

Helping at the station

Brodie Messenger, Herm-

iston Warming Station board chair, supervised the arrival of guests the night of Jan. 8. He offered water and help, where he could, and he engaged people in light conversation.

He said he has seen many people during his tenure. He started volunteering in 2015. He feels happy about the part he has played in helping people, he said, and he has had very few negative experiences.

He told of one day when a guest stole a phone. The guest, according to Messenger, became angry when he was confronted with the theft, and he threatened Messenger. Other guests, however, stood up for Messenger and prevented a possible attack, he said.

Mostly, he said, his experience at the station has been happy. He spoke of the many friends he has made there and the positive memories he has had.

Only three guests arrived that night, which left much of the warming station empty. He said he usually welcomes more people than that, and he expressed hope that the ones who did not arrive were well.

As it is only mid-January, there are many more nights in which people could use the Hermiston Warming Station to fight off the cold, he said.



Jim Roberts/Contributed Photo

A mudslide at about 4:20 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 8, 2022, slammed into two houses on the 200 block of Southeast Goodwin Avenue, Pendleton. Firefighters responded to the emergency right after taking on a house fire several blocks up the hill.

Damage:

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leton Fire Department for more information.

Winterton said she has the support of a large extended family in addition to other organizations that have come to their aid to help them get back on their feet. She still wants to rally support for her neighbor — Gena Naegeli — who lived in the next door unit with her mother and two children.

Winterton said Naegeli's family needs a permanent place to live and has started a GoFundMe to raise money for that effort. There also is a GoFundMe to help Winterton and her family.

About the time fire crews were leaving, the call came in at 4:19 p.m. about a mudslide on the 200 block of Southeast Goodwin Avenue, at the bottom of South Hill. Critchley said firefighters were en route from the fire two minutes later and arrived at the mudslide at 4:25 p.m. He said Pendleton and Tribal fire departments both responded.

Jim Roberts lives in the neighborhood and said he was working in his home when he heard a big vehicle and went out because he was expecting a delivery. The big vehicle, he said, turned out to be a fire engine. Roberts said he then saw the mudslide that hit two houses he lives only a few doors from.

The mass of soggy earth hit the back 204 1/2 S.E. Goodwin Ave., he said, and pushed the adjacent house at 208 S.E. Goodwin Ave. about 2 or 3 feet off its foundation.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A firefighter cuts a vent into the roof of a house Saturday, Jan. 8, 2022, while working to extinguish a fire at the home at 809 S.W. Sixth St., Pendleton.

"I could see the house was no longer aligned, and there was debris protruding between the houses," he said.

Roberts said a man who lives in one house just happened to be outside smoking when the hillside gave way.

"He saw the hill coming and ran," Roberts said.

But the mudslide trapped his dog in the home's basement, he said. Firefighters, however, were able to rescue the dog.

Ivy Ocacio said her father, brother, sister-in-law and their three children lived at 208. While no one was in the house at the time of the landslide, she said the unit now resembles "a mud swamp."

"My dad's apartment is unlivable," Ocacio said.

The uninhabitable condition of the apartment puts Ocacio's family in a tough position. Ocacio said her



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pendleton firefighters unload a ladder from a firetruck Saturday, Jan. 8, 2022, while responding to a home burning at 809 S.W. Sixth St., Pendleton.

brother and his family had moved into her father's apartment because they were taking care of him while he was undergoing radiation therapy. Without savings to fall back on, Ocacio said the family will have to raise money for a deposit and rent on a new place to live while also trying to replace clothing

and other goods lost in the landslide.

Ocacio said people looking to help out the family can send cash donations. A GoFundMe page has been set up to raise \$5,000 for the family and can be found at bit.ly/3JVqe1H. Ocacio said could also arrange donations by contacting her at 541-310-0435.

Omicron:

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Committee meetings will be livestreamed on the Legislature's information site, and public testimony will be accepted in written format and via video or phone.

According to press release, all Capitol visitors will be required to comply with public health and safety guidance, which includes wearing masks inside to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Capitol employees who can work remotely have been asked to do so during the session to help curb the spread of the virus which continues with the new omicron variant.

According to Dr. Peter Graven, director of OHSU's Office of Advanced Analytics, Oregon could see as many 1,650 hospitalizations due to the virus by the end of January.

On Jan. 7, 625 patients were hospitalized with COVID-19 across the state, according to the Oregon Health Authority. The state's COVID-19 burden peaked in September with around 1,200 hospitalizations.

The statehouse was closed to the public beginning in March 2020 and remained closed throughout the entire 2021 legislative session, with most staff working remotely in support of lawmakers who were still in the building.

The concept of remote work and wearing masks has been controversial topic in Salem.

Republicans have repeatedly argued the public has a constitutionally protected right to attend legislative proceedings in person. Lawmakers also have framed it as an equity issue for Oregonians who don't have internet access.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, said in the morning of Jan. 10 he hoped the Capitol would remain open.

"I think it's important for our process that we have accessibility. It can be done, the building has been opened before, but at the end of the day I won't have anything to say about it legislatively, it'll be made by other people," he said. "My preference would certainly be that we keep the building open if we possibly can."

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepburn, said legislative leaders have a lot to weigh in this situation.

"There's got to be a balance between protection of the First Amendment and the right to peaceably assemble and to be open and transparent with public safety," Smith said. "I would just ask our elected leaders to bring balance to that conversation and do everything they can do to allow for open, transparent government while protecting public safety."

You know, that's a tall order, but that's the balance that needs to be achieved."

Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, said in an email that she expects the 2022 session to mirror the last year's legislative process.

"The information we've been given so far leads us to believe that this session will look a lot like the 2021 session — except that the public will be able to enter the building," Levy said. "I am a firm believer that the People's Building is supposed to be open to the people, and I support opening those doors to the hardworking Oregonians we are honored to be representing."

She also urged anyone who feels sick to stay home.

"I'm eagerly looking forward to the days where we can trust and rely on Oregonian's common-sense in relation to their personal health," she said.

Mike Nearman, a former state representative from Independence, was expelled from the House and pleaded guilty to illegally allowing armed protestors into the building during a special session in December 2020.

Some Republicans — such as Sen. Dallas Heard — have openly defied Capitol health and safety protocols by not wearing a mask.

Heard also consistently voted against bills he might've otherwise supported as a means of protesting the Capitol's closure.

The Capitol reopened to the public in July 2021 shortly after last year's legislative session ended, but construction kept most of the building closed through the end of the year.

The two special sessions held in 2021 to redraw the state's political maps and to address emergency rent assistance were open to the public, but participation was historically low with new restrictions on which parts of the building members of the public and media could access.

Construction finished up last month, so lawmakers will regain access to their offices for the February session.

It remains unclear whether legislative leaders will impose any further restrictions due to the latest wave of infections.

Lawmakers approved a bill last year that will ensure remote access to legislative proceedings made necessary by the pandemic remain permanent moving forward. It took effect Jan. 1.

Kotek announced her resignation effective Jan. 21 to focus on her 2022 gubernatorial bid, meaning the House will need to vote on new leadership before any rules are imposed.

—EO Media Group reporter Alex Wittwer contributed to this article.