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Homeless Veteran Finds Shelter at SAHA

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By KATE WILLIAMS | The Sonoma Index Tribune | June 17, 2021

At the end of a long day when fatigue overtakes us, most people don?t stop to ponder the pleasures of a clean, warm bed. It is simply there waiting, like the rest of the house, a comfort so fundamental as to be assumed.

But Bob Krah, 63, hasn?t made such assumptions for a very long time.

Krah has been homeless for 20 years. Sleeping outdoors, he would scout overhangs and bridge abutments to secure shelter from the elements, and then sleep with one eye open as a

hedge against predators. Krah knows the value of a safe, comfortable bed.

Last week, he slept in his own for the first time in decades.

?It?s awesome. Incredible.? Bob Krah on his new SAHA apartment.

The Satellite Affordable Housing Associates? (SAHA) development called Alta Madrone at 1269 Broadway was built for the exclusive use of low-income tenants. Ten of the project?s 48 units are held for veterans seeking housing, which is where Krah, and his friend and advocate Marie Koller, come in.

Bob Krah was stationed in Korea during his year of service in the United States Army, but that seems like a lifetime ago. In the years since, Krah?s capabilities declined, and he found himself overwhelmed by the modern world.

?He is of sound mind, but his executive functioning skills are limited,? Koller said. ?He?s not a planner. He can?t think from one day to the next.? Asking Krah to navigate the arcane complexities of a public housing application on his own was impossible, and so Koller decided to help.

Koller first met Krah at the Vintage House senior center, where he would often seek shelter during daylight hours. But Krah has a particular attachment to the grocery cart in which he keeps his belongings, and the cart wasn?t allowed indoors at the senior center. Koller has a way of keeping Krah calm, and a low-key, oblique approach to their friendship. ?He sticks to himself. He doesn?t want to be around people. He?s not an alcoholic, not a drug addict. He just doesn?t really want to talk to anybody,? she said.

Koller found a solution to Krah?s cart anxiety at Vintage House, and the two grew closer over the next several months.

?But then COVID happened,? Koller said. The world shut down, and Krah and Koller?s fledgling friendship hit pause.

By September, however, Koller had been laid low herself. She?d lost her job and was suffering from pandemic fallout like everyone else. She realized she needed something to focus her thoughts. ?The only way for me to keep my head above water was to help other people, and then help myself,? she said.

She got a call from local homeless advocate Annie Falandes, who reported that Krah was not doing well. ?He trusts you,? Falandes told Koller when she asked for her help.

To get Krah through the public housing application gauntlet, he needed a bunch of things that he didn?t have: a social security card, a printed medical history, and a California I.D., for starters. He also needed to present a housing history to SAHA administrators, which ? after 20 years on the streets ? he simply did not have. ?He couldn?t proceed with the normal process, and so we went through a whole different process to get Bob vetted,? Koller said. She took him ? and his cart ? to the DMV and to the doctor, she organized his medications and replaced his cart twice when it broke. She even helped him get vaccinated against COVID. ?We are bringing him into the fold of societal norms. It took a lot of work, let me tell you,? Koller said.

Two weeks ago, Bob Krah met with a SAHA administrator to start the orientation process

required of new tenants. Last week, he moved into a brand new one-bedroom apartment.

?It?s awesome. Incredible,? Krah said in a Facetime phone call with the Index-Tribune, while perched on his new, donated bed. Krah is a quiet, tidy looking man who finds everyday chitchat emotionally taxing. Asked to explain how he fell into homelessness, Krah looked away and fell silent.

?Sometimes things happen that are difficult to overcome,? Koller said.

Krah has lived in Northern California his whole life, but has not maintained contact with his family. He depends on Social Security for income and CalFresh for food, and has been gifted furnishings and an old computer for his new apartment. These things represent a radical change of circumstance for Krah, one he is embracing with quiet enthusiasm. He?s teaching himself how to do various tasks by watching tutorials on YouTube, and is currently fascinated by furniture repair and refinishing. ?I?ve gotta go to Friedman?s right now to get a bottle of glue,? he said.

?If anyone needs a piece of furniture refinished, call Bob,? Koller said, smiling.

Koller doesn?t really consider what she?s done charity; she believes she got as much as she gave. ?I saw his personality and the way he holds himself. The fact that he?s always spotlessly clean. He?s a kind person, an intelligent person. He?s just had it rough. So what? I find him fascinating. We have really interesting conversations. I genuinely saw that this person could use some help and I was and am capable of helping him,? she said.

?I?ve got a good friend here,? Krah said before signing off. A wobbly piece of furniture needed his attention.

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