

# Hometown homeless woman and husband await housing

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to sleep on the ground, she says, aggravated the nerve damage from her diabetes and reinforced her arthritis.

"Nobody knows how bad the pain is," she said.

She had two boys with two different Cuban American men when she was in her early 20s before marrying her first husband, the late Eddie Benjamin, who she said died of liver cancer at 52 in 2005. They'd been together 28 years, including decades camped under the highway where 101 crosses Cesar Chavez.

One of her sons, she says, Pedro Tehuma, 32, is homeless and living on Division Street. The other, Miguel Lopez, 34, became a professional boxer and opened a gym called Boxing for Health in Oakland near Lake Merritt. Its Website includes a videotaped interview with him on the eve of a fight, in which he speaks of growing up fighting in the Fillmore, raised by a grandma who "brought me up in the church," and that he "never got a chance to meet" his dad, who was from Havana and got arrested. "Boxing actually saved my life," he says. He's married, the Website says, with at least one child. The Extra's calls to Boxing for Health went unreturned.

Emmett gave up drinking before he went to prison, but still he occasionally attends AA meetings. He has been Elaine's "24-hour caregiver," she says, since they got together a handful of years ago.

Elaine says she began evangelical work while "doing time" 38 years ago. That was for "a mistake I made in life. I learned by my mistakes," she says, but was reluctant to delve further into particulars.

She began her outreach ministry 20 years ago and eventually began studying

for a license.

Emmett recalls that Elaine was dressed all in white the day they met, at Carl's Jr. at U.N. Plaza.

He was on General Assistance, living at the Pierre Hotel on Jones Street, his home for five years. He'd also lived at the MultiService Center shelter at Fifth and Bryant for about a year, he said.

She was staying at the Coronado, on Ellis around the corner from the Pierre. She'd been there since her first husband died.

She would go to the restaurant every day to study on her way to St. Andrews Baptist in the Fillmore, where Assistant Pastor Jeff Branner told The Extra she earned her ministry license "about 10 years ago." Emmett frequented the restaurant too, and eventually got up the nerve to say hello.

"We would talk every day at Carl's Jr.," Elaine told The Extra. "We courted for three years before he ever got a kiss from me. Ever since then, we've been together."

"We did our vows through the pastor and everything but our license," Emmett says, explaining that he is trying to finalize a divorce from a woman who is "in a psych ward."

They have stories about suffering through the effects of deferred maintenance at SROs. The last one was the Mayfair, in the 600 block of Polk. There were problems with burglaries "every time we would leave," she said. There were rodents, and leaking pipes that fed mold and mildew "like jelly." The management didn't want to hear about it, she said, so "Emmett was fixing a lot of things himself."

"I refused to pay the rent," she says. Eviction papers soon ensued, but on the day of the court hearing, Elaine says, the security guards downstairs at 850 Bry-



MARK HEDIN

**Emmett and Elaine Amos are living temporarily at the Navigation Center on Mission Street. Elaine was born at Kaiser Hospital S.F., and Emmett years ago came to the city as a refugee from Southern California. They became homeless in 2010 and recently were among the Division Street tent city community.**

ant St. cost her her case.

They took their sweet time processing her through the metal detectors. She'd taken the trouble to arrive early, but, forced to wait, she says, she suffered a mini-stroke. Instead of going to court, she was taken to the hospital by ambulance. Emmett tried to get the proceedings delayed, to no avail.

It was 2010, and they were on the streets. To begin with, they put down temporary stakes at Division at San Bruno Avenue.

"I can't do shelters," Elaine said. "It's like a prison to me. No fresh air, can't breathe, constantly getting sick, can't leave when you want to, or bring food in...I couldn't get no rest at the shelters cause of the constant fighting. It was just like being in prison. If I wanted to do time, I woulda done crime."

They kept trying to find real housing, putting in applications all over the Bay Area, she says, but "never heard nothing. It was just one letdown after another."

Emmett's prison record worked against his efforts to find both employment and housing.

Elaine, as Pastor K — who claims a professional-caliber voice for gospel singing — for years has been counseling people against drug use and crime, providing comfort and encouragement where she can, she says.

It's "spiritual counseling, couples counseling, people dealing with issues, bad vices," she said. "To me, it's 'lost and found' — finding their lives through Christ Jesus."

One of her recent students, she said in June, had just graduated from a chef's training program.

"We're so proud of him," she said. "He came a mighty long way, changed his life tremendously."

The Amoses struggled with the attention focused on the Division Street campsites and repeatedly found their possessions swept away when they turned their backs.

"It was like nobody'd ever been there, like 'Wizard of Oz,'" she said. Her home "was picked up like it was never there." Eventually, they set up across from the Trader Joe's shopping center at Eighth and Brannan.

"I did a lot of ministry down there, chased drug addicts away, got people to straighten up, let them know they don't have to live like that. We stopped a lot of the bike thieving, drug dealers moved out. We helped the police," Elaine says.

"I don't mind doing it, 'cause I live here. Kept it clean."

"She's rad, I'm a huge fan of her," Kelley Cutler, Human Rights Organizer for the Coalition on Homelessness, told The Extra.

Elaine credits Cutler for helping them land in the Navigation Center, but Cutler won't accept that credit.

The Navigation Center is "the golden ticket" for people on the streets, Cutler said.

"There's been a few situations in particular where they just really need to get in — services, health — or who continue to keep trying and trying and keep hitting roadblocks. When there's someone that we see time and time again, we'll do an extra push to get people connected." But "It's usually pretty extreme situations. Everyone needs some extra advocacy. I'll definitely do what I can to get them in touch with those who can connect them up."

"When we heard about the Navigation Center, we were trying to get up here, because I couldn't go back to no shelter," Elaine says. "I was getting sicker and sicker. This was a lot on Emmett. I couldn't stand seeing him go through this all the time."

"When we finally got in here, it was much better," Elaine says. "Twenty times better than Pier 80. Staff here is a lot more cooperative. They don't label you, they really do help you, listen to you," she said as Emmett nodded in agreement.

"They care, they show they care," Emmett said. "That's good."

Elaine said their goal is to find permanent housing "as quick as we can. I want to continue to try to help other people," she said.

In late June she said she expects to move on from the Navigation Center and into permanent housing soon. "They said sometime next month we'll probably be out of here, hopefully."

Without discussing the Amoses in particular, Julie Leadbetter, director of the Navigation Center for the city's office of H.O.P.E. (Housing Opportunity, Partnerships and Engagement), said that everyone who is brought into the Navigation Center is guaranteed housing eventually.

"We keep them until they're housed," she said. "It will be permanent and affordable. It depends on what they qualify for. We screen them for what they qualify for."

The Amoses are eager to move on. ■



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Building	Size & Amenities	Max/Min Household Income Limits	Rent as of Feb. 1, 2015
<b>The Knox SRO</b> located at 241- 6th St. & Tehama is accepting applications and has an <b>OPEN WAITLIST</b>	<b>SRO – 1 Person or Couple</b>	1 person	Move-in deposit
	Room size: 10 ½ x 18 (Semi-Private) bathroom 7 x 7 Unit amenities: sink, microwave, refrigerator, 2-burner stove, closet, single bed Building amenities: small gym, library, private lounge, roof top garden, community kitchen, laundry facility, 24 hour staff & surveillance	\$34,600/year 2 person \$39,520/year Minimum income of \$1,374/month	\$687 Monthly rent \$687 plus utilities
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