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Cash found in a deposit box helps man give back to the youth shelter that put him on his path



Kevin Doar, 45, of Seattle ducks under a "Welcome Back Kevin!" Banner at the Waymakers youth home in Laguna Beach on Monday, March 6, 2023. He stayed there when he was a teen. Thirty years later, he reunited with volunteer Carol Carlson, now the director of the Youth Shelter Program. (Photo by Mindy Schauer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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He remembers a decent life with his adoptive parents before a “trajectory downhill ended their marriage in divorce,” he said. By age 16 he was living in an RV behind an Anaheim pool repair shop, just a few miles from Disneyland. He recalled living in “total squalor...and starving.” He tried to escape his unhappy family life by spending hours at the Central Library, “reading books, or newspapers, or magazines that were free,” and going home only to sleep.

Doar said he was “shell shocked” when police eventually intervened and took him from the library to Waymakers, a nonprofit youth shelter in Laguna Beach.

On Monday, March 6, the now 45-year-old Seattle resident was back, thanks to a computer search and a safe deposit box full of cash.

Carol Carlson, now director of the Youth Shelter Program, said she remembers the strawberry-blond teen from when he arrived in 1993 and she was a young volunteer. Doar now holds two master’s degrees and works in IT at the University of Washington.

Standing inside the center’s bright, airy living room with his wife, Sarah, Doar recalled the memories of his life-changing two months there.

He remembers the shelter’s refrigerator and the luxury of opening its door and having food whenever he liked. He remembers the basketball court in the backyard and missing a lot of his shots despite his 6-foot-2-inch frame. He remembers his third-story bedroom with the ocean view and field trips to an art museum and the beach.

Carlson remembers the lanky boy’s head hitting the door jam on his way into the kitchen.

“To go from a beat-up RV to this, was pretty amazing,” he said.

“When you arrive, you’re on a path, and if you keep going it’s not good,” he said.

“I wouldn’t want to see that future ... I don’t want to think about it.

“It gave me an off ramp,” Doar said. He didn’t have to think only of his survival. “I had a sense of normalcy. I was able to breathe.”

Doar never returned to the RV or his mother. Arrangements were made for him to live with “the other half of my family,” in North Carolina, he said, where he finished high school and went on to college.

A couple of years ago, Doar did a search of [unclaimed money from the government](#) and discovered his now deceased mother had a safe deposit box. He was hoping it contained photos of himself as a kid, but instead it held \$2,000 in cash.

He didn't know how his mother came into the money, and he didn't feel right spending it on himself, he said. Instead, he decided to give back to the place that set him on a different road.

Carlson was curious. She wanted to know why someone from out of state would donate to her local organization. After some investigation, CEO Ronnetta Johnson learned the story behind the money. The women invited Doar to visit if he was ever in the area.

As luck would have, Doar and his wife were planning a 16th wedding anniversary trip to Dana Point for the Festival of Whales.

Carlson picked the couple up at their hotel and drove them to the shelter for a tour. Strung across the front porch was a banner: "Welcome Back Kevin!"

"It looks exactly the same," Doar said as he entered the three-story home, remembering the room where he'd watched "The X-Files" on TV.

But Waymakers isn't the same. During its early days, the nonprofit's focus was on runaway, homeless and at-risk kids, Carlson said. "In 2006, we answered the call for more mental health services and we hired more professionals to work with kids with higher mental health concerns."

Annually, about 100 children pass through its Laguna Beach doors with severe anxiety, depression and some who have attempted suicide. The organization has expanded to four homes in Orange County—adding two in Tustin and another in Huntington Beach.

So far, 4,400 teens have been served in Laguna Beach since its 1979 inception, Carlson said.

Waymakers mission is to help "individuals make their way through conflict and crisis to a place of strength and stability." It is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

"It was a long journey," Doar said. "The anger and pain will be with you for the

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Mindy Schauer | Photographer

Mindy Schauer is an award-winning photojournalist for the Orange County Register. As a general-interest news photographer, she documents everyone and everything, from poverty in the hollows of West Virginia, to sports heroes and celebrities in Hollywood. She has covered Hurricane Andrew, California wildfires, Pope Francis, four presidents, and religious outreach in Rwanda — not to mention puppies, schoolkids and everyday life in her community. Mindy is a two-time Marine Corps Heritage Foundation award winner and ranks among the top photographers in the National Press Photographers Association's Western Region each year. Mindy's Pulitzer-nominated work documenting the life of a teen mom and her children hangs in the Clinton Presidential Library in Arkansas. And when Mindy's own daughter, Jenna, was born, Mindy photographed the birth herself for a feature in the Register. Mindy is a graduate of the Arizona State University Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Before joining the Register, she worked at the Huntington (W.Va.) Herald-Dispatch, Los Angeles Times and Orlando Sentinel.

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