

JUBILEE PARTNERS REPORT

Spring 2022

*“The Lord watches over the sojourners,
he upholds the widow and the fatherless.”*

Psalm 146



Taliban swept back into power, upending lives and displacing hundreds of thousands of people in the course of a month. When war drives people from their homes, the loss happens quickly. The process of rebuilding lives that comes afterwards is longer and slower.

Two Afghan families lived with us at Jubilee this past winter. When these families arrived here, the sense of grief over losing their homes was very fresh. With the help of an interpreter, the fathers in the two families, Ahmad and Sayyid, described for us what their lives had been like back in Afghanistan. Ahmad and Sayyid are cousins, and their families lived very close to one another and to other members of their extended family. Their houses shared a kind of common courtyard: "There was no wall between us, we could visit each other freely," Sayyid explained. He described their tradition of visiting one another on the Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan fasting. One person might walk over to a relative's house, and then the two together go to a third person's home, and then all of them go back to the first person's home, eating and

talking with each other the whole time. Sayyid lived in a house along with his parents: his mother and father in one bedroom, Sayyid and his wife in another, and their children in a third. Their children attended a government school a half-mile walk away.

Ahmad and Sayyid had both been part of the government security forces in Afghanistan, working closely with the American military for fourteen years. They were matter-of-fact in describing the violence and the danger that is a constant reality during civil war. The children's school was closed at times because of threats from the Taliban, they explained. Innocent people could be mistakenly targeted by Afghan government forces or U.S. forces, or killed as



The families enjoy the view on an outing to Tallulah Falls.



The women sit down together to share a meal.

bystanders. In their town, though, the families felt safe. They knew all the families that lived there, and most of the people in their town also worked for the Afghan government or the U.S. military. They trusted that their neighbors would look out for their safety and the safety of the whole community. “Our life before August was very good,” Sayyid told me. “We were very happy.”

When the Taliban fighters swept across the country during the withdrawal of American forces, this life came to an end very quickly. As town after town fell to the Taliban, Ahmad and Sayyid were ordered not to stay and fight, but were sent to Kabul to secure the city. There is a deep grief for them in this: that they were not allowed to stand and defend their homes as they had prepared themselves to do. Ahmad described riding in the army trucks from Jalalabad to Kabul, the streets full of men, women and children who were fleeing from the Taliban. Ahmad recalled the desperation of the crowds that they left behind in the road. “The people were shouting to us, ‘When you leave, who are you leaving us to? Do you know what you are doing?’” Soldiers sat in the trucks, he said, holding their guns and weeping.

Ahmad and Sayyid talked about their sense of futility and waste after the Afghan government fell to the Taliban. “Many thousands of people lost their lives to fight for that government,” Sayyid said. “They wanted to keep that government, that freedom. Now that we lost the government, it means that all those lives were wasted.” The many Afghans who had worked with the U.S.-supported government are now in especially great danger under the Taliban. Some like Ahmad and Sayyid were evacuated to the United States, but a great many others were not. Sayyid described how most of the young people in their extended family have fled to Pakistan, while the older people have stayed behind to protect their homes and property. Even the family members who were evacuated to the United States are living in different states all across the country. Their only way of communicating with their friends and family now is by social media; the family and community that had lived together for decades is broken up. “We lost our house, we lost our relatives, we lost our family, our parents, our very good friends,” Sayyid said. “We lost them, we cannot meet them.”

Now in the U.S., Ahmad and Sayyid are looking ahead with a determined hopefulness. “We are optimistic about the future,” Sayyid said. “We hope that our life gets better. We want [our children] to get educated here. They make their lives better, and that makes our lives better.” He mentioned a cousin that came to the U.S. several years ago under the Special Immigrant Visa program for Afghans. “He made a very good life for himself. He has a very good life here in America.” At the same time that they are looking ahead to a new life in America, Ahmad and Sayyid have not entirely given up hope that the situation in Afghanistan might change, that they might someday be able to return home.

In their four months here at Jubilee, these two families brought a lot of joy with them along with their grief. We shared many jokes, and a lot of food. We got to know the fifteen beautiful children in these two families: their smiles, their games, and their laughter, as well as their tears. We don’t understand why the violence of our world inflicts such heavy losses on some families, and we can’t see down the road that lies before them now. But we trust in the promise that God’s love is with them, and we give thanks for the blessings that they brought to us.

Tribute to Ryan Karis

Ryan Karis, one of the co-founders of Jubilee Partners, died on January 15, 2022, at age 71. Ryan and Karen Karis lived at Jubilee for the first 10 years of its history, and they loom large in the history and identity of the community; as well as in the personal memories of the many refugees, volunteers, and visitors who came through Jubilee while they were here.

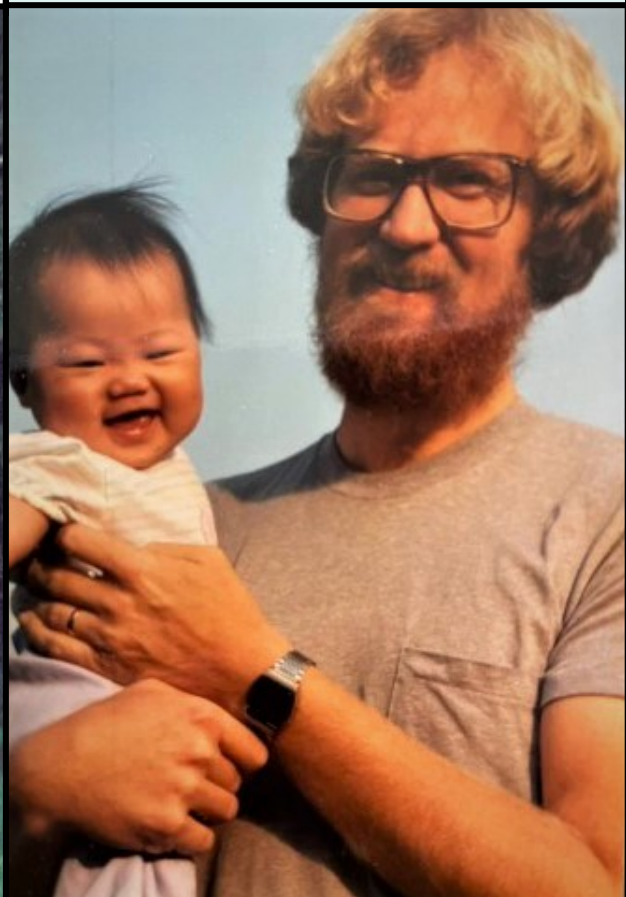
Ryan possessed a lot of practical, useful skills. He was integral in the design and construction of a number of buildings at Jubilee. He was very organized and methodical, and was especially adept at moving from the visioning/dreaming stage to the ‘nuts and bolts’ work of making those dreams a reality. Don remembers the morning after the first night that the founders spent on the Jubilee property, camping together in the cow pasture when there were no buildings, electricity, or running water yet. Ryan looked around and observed, “Well, it looks like there’s a lot of work to be done. We’d better get started.”

In addition to his construction expertise, Ryan served in many roles in the community. He was one of the main shapers of the Año de Jubileo Program in the 1980’s, which ultimately led to the resettlement of 1,321 Central American refugees in Canada, preventing them from being deported back to the countries they had fled.

Ryan was a gentle person, who was always ready to listen and simply be present with people. He cared deeply about his family. He also had a great sense of humor. One of Ryan’s favorite short films that we showed dozens of times to groups of refugees was a film called “Midsummer Mush”, starring Charley Chase. It was a slapstick comedy with few words, which appealed to folks with limited English. The main character was a bumbling Cub Scout leader who took his



Ryan and Karen with Andrew and Rebekah (1980s)





Ryan, Rebekah, and Andrew help lay a level foundation for some of Jubilee's early houses.

troop camping in the woods by a very small pond. The scout leader's tent kept falling down and he kept falling in the lake, but he was undeterred. He loved to stand on the bank of that tiny pond, breathe in the fresh air of the outdoors, throw out his arms and declare, "Oh the vastness of it all!" Ryan loved that phrase, and would employ it as he faced mountains of dishes at the Jubilee sink, or as a pile of lumber was delivered for a new construction project. Now that he has graduated from the earthly portion of his life, we can well imagine him looking around and saying with true wonder, "Oh, the vastness of it all!"

Thank you, Ryan, for the life, the love, and the adventure that you shared with us.

from the people of Jubilee



Who we are

Jubilee Partners is an ecumenical Christian service community in northeast Georgia. We offer hospitality to refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants who have fled violence or persecution. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; donations are thus tax-deductible. Your donations and support of our work are most appreciated.

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Above: Spring Volunteer Chris and his mom Linda Fuller sort items in the maintenance shop.

Left: We welcomed baby Naomi Jubilee Hussey to the community in December!



Members of the new afterschool program at The Perch, together with many other neighbors, came to paint in leaves on the tree of the mural that Tracy Newton (right) has been working on recently. It's almost done! Check out our blog later this month to learn the story behind the image.



View Jubilee's newsletter in color online at www.jubileepartners.org!

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Our Afghan guests have popularized the Eastern art form of henna at Jubilee this spring!