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Danny Rice: There are people who are working to try to figure out these solutions.

Mike Robinson: Oh yeah, they've got a regular task force going and they can come up with all the answers that we need, because they're rewriting the zoning laws in Bloomington, just to accommodate tiny homes.

Danny Rice: Hello and welcome to the newly renamed Bloomington Public Library Podcast: Shelf Understanding, where you can really learn to understand your shelf. I'm your host, Danny Rice, children's librarian, bookmobile driver, real life gingerbread man. Before we begin we wanted to clarify something, we recently changed our name because we thought of a new one that we liked better. It did not have anything to do with us receiving a cease and desist from a Seattle based newsletter, called Shelf Awareness, informing us that they had trademarked that name, therefore legally requiring that we do so. It simply has to do with the fact that we like the new name better. Seriously though, Shelf Awareness is a pretty cool resource for finding new books week by week, you should check them out if you have time.

Anyway, on this episode of Shelf Understanding we'll be talking about a phenomenon that is gaining more and more traction in recent years: tiny houses. Tiny houses have long been an interesting alternative to more traditional homes, particularly in areas with low income or low amounts of physical space. Some are made out of old storage containers, some, called skoolies, are converted from school buses, which we'll talk about later, and others are made out of the same materials as what we would consider to be a regular house. There's even a show called "Tiny House Nation," on the FYI network, which follows people who have chosen this kind of residence.

Tiny houses are nothing new, however here at the Bloomington Library we've had a few recent developments that sparked our interest in this topic that we wanted to explore in greater detail. The first is that about a year ago one of the part-time employees that has been working in our circulation department for the longest amount of time announced that she would be leaving us, because she and her family were going to move to an organic farm and that they would be living in a tiny house while they did. More on that in a minute. The other event was that we held a program about how the tiny house movement could offer the homeless population in Bloomington-Normal a cost effective and space effective housing opportunity.

We had a team of presenters explain how we could get involved. We expected a few people would show up, but we were astonished when the program had more than 70 people attend. We wanted some further insight, so we invited

Clare and Armondo Báez to come talk to us, and we also invited Mike Robinson, who's a general contractor working as part of a task force to reshape the Bloomington zoning laws. Clare and Armondo Báez are the kind of people who tell you that they're going to be taking a few months off from their jobs to work on an organic farm in Ireland, and yet somehow you weren't that surprised to hear about it.

They have been WWOOFers, meaning that they've worked with the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms organization at www.woof.net, which is an international organization that pairs organic farms in rural areas of the world with people who are interested in starting their own farms. Clare and Armondo also have two sons who are under the age of five, so when Clare informed us at the library that Armondo would be starting an organic farming internship lasting about a year and that she and her family would be living on a skoolie for the duration of Armondo's internship it didn't come as a huge surprise.

As of right now, Armondo's internship has finished and they've recently moved back to town, so we wanted to pick their brains about this unique period of their lives. Until recently the two of you lived in a skoolie, which is a special kind of tiny house, when did you move out there, Armondo?

Armondo Báez: It was the beginning of March and then Clare and the kids came out early April.

Danny Rice: Oh okay, so you were out there for a little bit by yourself before they joined you.

Armondo Báez: Yeah, when it was like 20 degrees, just to kind of test things out and make sure the heat worked and the water was, actually the water wasn't on.

Clare Báez: And you were doing stuff too, like you put down the floor.

Armondo Báez: Oh yeah. Yeah, I was working on stuff, so I was finishing up some work-

Danny Rice: On the actual skoolie?

Armondo Báez: Yeah. Yeah. Yup, so there was less, yeah, there was less than a month to get stuff done, because the bus was sitting for about two years after we bought it, and so there was some work that needed to be done and just, yeah, a lot of work.

Danny Rice: Okay.

Armondo Báez: We worked on it and then, yeah, moved it out there.

Danny Rice: Now a skoolie, for those of you who may not be aware, is a tiny house that was originally a school bus. Do you know of other types of tiny houses that have kind of been converted?

Armondo Báez: Well I think there's quite a few. It's funny because you have to look for it. I know there's a website that has a good following. That's where we found this skoolie, but basically what I understand is it's far cheaper than buying like traditional RV. You can customize it yourself, so once you strip out everything from the inside you can make it the way you want it. Then it's by far a lot safer, so-

Clare Báez: Than a RV, you mean.

Armondo Báez: Than a RV, so they do different tests on RVs, like trees falling on them and windstorms and all that, like simulation of tornadoes and the RVs just tear in half. They're just not built to withstand pretty much-

Danny Rice: The same conditions.

Armondo Báez: Yeah and so then the school bus for the purposes it houses children, so they make them rock solid, and especially the older post 1980s school buses, it's just like solid steel all the way around. It's amazing, so they're basically tanks that people take, buy for cheap, and then build into a home and it's like, it's permanent. Yeah.

Danny Rice: I had always assumed that the main draws of using a school bus as a form shelter would be both availability and cost, but they logically have better safety features than, say, an RV, because they're designed to keep children safe. This is one of the main reasons that the skoolie is among the more common types of tiny houses. The website that we were trying to remember is called skoolie.net, that is S-K-O-O-L-I-E.net, in case you want to find out more about skoolies.

Clare Báez: Ours is a '73 Crown Coach.

Danny Rice: What are the dimensions of it?

Armondo Báez: It's 40 feet long and then we figured it's about roughly, was it 250 square feet, right?

Clare Báez: I think 240.

Armondo Báez: Yeah, around 240, 250 square feet inside. It's a diesel and it's got, geeze, pretty much everything you need.

Danny Rice: Yeah, I was going to ask about amenities and how that works.

Armondo Báez: Yeah, so it's equipped with two heaters, like a fire place and then a catalytic heater. It's got a nice propane stove or gas stove, apartment size fridge, so like a really good size, a washer and dryer unit together, an on demand hot water heater. Am I missing-

Clare Báez: Yeah, like regular, it's got a toilet, a shower-

Armondo Báez: A shower, yeah.

Clare Báez: There's water tanks on top, but I don't remember how much it holds. Is it two 50 gallon water tanks?

Armondo Báez: Yeah, it's four 50 gallon tanks, where you could carry that many gallons with you if you're on the road or in the wilderness-

Clare Báez: Yeah, if you wanted to go off grid, because then it's also got solar panels on top and batteries, so you don't have to hook up to-

Danny Rice: Off grid?

Clare Báez: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Danny Rice: Go on.

Clare Báez: If you don't want to go to, say, an RV park and hook up your water and electricity you can just be out somewhere where those things aren't available and still have water and power through the batteries for things, for like lights and that kind of thing.

Danny Rice: It has the basic amenities, like it has pretty much everything that you need. Do you find often that you are thinking like, oh, I wish we had this, like this something we don't have in our skoolie, in our tiny house, that we did have somewhere else? Besides just more space.

Armondo Báez: Right.

Clare Báez: No. The only thing I wish it had was a dishwasher, but like that's just never going to happen.

Danny Rice: Yeah.

Armondo Báez: A dishwasher.

Clare Báez: But no.

Armondo Báez: No. Yeah, more space is always the one that you think of.

Clare Báez: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Danny Rice: What first got the ball rolling that you wanted to live in a tiny house?

Clare Báez: Paraguay. Probably the trip to Paraguay.

Armondo Báez: Yeah.

Clare Báez: Right after we got married, well not right after, less than a year after we got married we decided that we wanted to go and visit Armondo's family, who live in Paraguay in South America, for an extended amount of time, so he quit his job and we went for two months. While we were there we saw just like a different way to live, which everybody there seemed so much more content and happy and we really liked that and I think that kind of was the jumping off point for thinking like you can live differently than they do here and it can be really good for you and for your family.

Danny Rice: I know you two have also done the WOOFing thing before too. Did that play into it at all?

Armondo Báez: Oh yeah.

Clare Báez: Oh yeah. That was after Paraguay. I think, well, I don't know, what do you think about WOOFing?

Armondo Báez: Well I was just going to comment on the question earlier, about kind of what makes somebody decide to buy a school bus and park it somewhere-

Clare Báez: And live in it with your family?

Armondo Báez: Somewhere in town. Yeah. I think there was, at least for me, there was a lot going through my mind. I think Clare, this might have been ... Even though I don't remember the conversation, but it must've been really interesting as far as, hey, I want to buy this 40 foot school bus to live in, what do you think?

Clare Báez: Honestly I remember and remembering being like-

Armondo Báez: I don't.

Clare Báez: Okay, sure and we just like did it.

Armondo Báez: I don't even know how like ... Yeah, because I know was trying to like sell it before I mentioned it, like trying to sell it. I know-

Clare Báez: There was no conversation. It was just like okay let's just find whatever, which sounds good.

Danny Rice: Knowing you, Clare, that doesn't really surprise me, because when you told me that you were going to be quitting your job at the library and moving to a farm and farming for a year, I was like, "Yeah, that sounds-"

Clare Báez: Sounds about right.

Danny Rice: Sounds about right. I'm not surprised.

Armondo Báez: I think trying out the idea of owning the place that you live in, because for the longest time we've always rented where we've lived and you always know this isn't permanent, this is temporary and it feels like a waste of money, because it's not going towards anything. Even with buying a home, like the mortgage and the interest rate, it's like you don't really own the home, the bank still owns the home. You're paying the bank and you also get to pay a little bit into principal. The idea of owning your own home, living in it, and kind of seeing what that's like. Not to mention downsizing like everything you own.

Danny Rice: Yeah, all your stuff.

Armondo Báez: It's all your stuff.

Danny Rice: Yeah.

Armondo Báez: Kind of, in a sense, like it challenge to myself and to my family and Clare to like what is ... There's that ultimate question of what is happiness and I think we've been slowly asking that and looking and experimenting. I think this was part of it, just to see like let's downsize, let's see what happens.

Danny Rice: That takes a tremendous amount of courage. I mean I don't know if I'd be able to do that. I don't think a lot of people would be willing to kind of take that plunge. I guess I have to ask, how is it living on a school bus on a farm with four people, two of whom are young boys?

Clare Báez: Yeah.

Armondo Báez: So many things happened all at once, so you had moving away from your hometown, living on a farm, working a farm job, living in a tiny home that's a school bus and then having two kids that are growing. It was all at the same time.

Clare Báez: It was a lot.

Danny Rice: That is a lot.

Armondo Báez: It's hard to put into words, especially because also the length of time is nine months, but definitely like very challenging. Also so rewarding just because, I think, for the most part we realized that what we were doing was exactly what we wanted to be doing, so I think, for myself, I've worked a lot of jobs where it's more just a job to work because it's making the money and I need the money to pay for rent or food or whatever. This was a real experience to know what it was like to work a job where it's I truly believe that's what I want to be doing and just living the whole thing and seeing-

Clare Báez: Yeah, living in the bus, like living in such a way where that felt like we were living, I don't know, in a way that we believed in, something that we hadn't

done before, where we really were conscious of everything that we're using and all the resources and living that whole experience, like the farm, the bus, it was all like a lifestyle choice, I guess, and they all kind of tied in with one another. It was, it was so rewarding and it was really challenging too, to say goodbye to some of those comforts of going places, buying things, that kind of thing and it can be difficult when you choose to do something different than the people around.

The culture that we live in you're kind of saying that maybe you don't want to be as much of a part of that culture and that can be, for me, I thought it was the one thing that I didn't like was I felt that it could be isolating to be out ... When you say, like somebody asks you what you do and you say, "You work on an organic farm," there's already like a perceived notion about what you're like and then you say, "I live in a school bus." They're like, "Okay," so then they pretty much assume they know exactly-

Danny Rice: Your situation.

Clare Báez: Your situation and who you are and what you're like and what you like or don't like and so I think that part could be kind of isolating. On the other hand I really felt like it was so rewarding to give up those things and feel free from all of them and just to be out there and really enjoy your work and really be able to like connect with our kids and be outside.

Danny Rice: Have you found it a worthwhile trade? Do you think that the-

Clare Báez: Yes.

Danny Rice: Well, I guess I should start by saying do you feel isolated often and, if so, is it worth it?

Clare Báez: Not often, but, yes, I do and, yes, I think it's worth it. We always try and make decision that are, the ultimate goal is like our family's happiness and well being and I think that this decision to do this, to live in a school bus and also to work on the farm, which like they're tied in and you can't really separate the two, was the right decision for our family.

Danny Rice: Are there other people, families living out at the farm?

Clare Báez: Yes, there is another family there with their daughter, who was, she turned two while we were out there and then there was another intern, a single woman, and then he had a few farmhands that come. One guy that's been working for him for like 10 years and his partner came out and she was pregnant and then his family, and by him, I mean Henry, who owns the farm. Yeah and then his, Henry's family. Yeah, that's about it.

Danny Rice: It should be noted of course that this is not the case in all tiny house situations, but was largely due to Clare and Armondo's particular situation. The occasional sense of isolation that Clare felt has less to do with living in a tiny house and more to do with living in one relatively small piece of a very large farm and therefore not having many people close by. Clare, you had mentioned cutting down on resources, we talked about utilities a little bit, but do you find that you are more aware of the resources that you use when you're kind of living in this pared down environment?

Clare Báez: Yes. Absolutely. What's a good example? Like showers, maybe?

Armondo Báez: No just the bus in itself being like a pod that has these obvious connections that you see, so there's like a hose for water that you see every day when you walk by the bus, so you know you're tapped into the water source. You see the electrical line that's plugged in. The bus, it seems like some sort of like utility that you have to plug in. The stove and the fireplace and stuff is all propane. We have to switch those propane tanks out like every month-

Clare Báez: You know how much you're using.

Armondo Báez: Yeah, so when you do that you know how much you're using. That goes along with like the water too, like, you said, just because, I don't know, like showers are very simple. For a while I tried to rig up a shower head that would come from the bus, from the kitchen faucet, so there'd be some pressure, so there'd be some pressure, but that was just harder than it needed to be. I just had like a gallon jug of-

Clare Báez: This is outside too.

Armondo Báez: Yeah, so we made-

Clare Báez: By the way.

Armondo Báez: Yeah.

Clare Báez: This is the outside shower, not the inside one.

Armondo Báez: Yeah, we have an inside one.

Clare Báez: We never use that.

Danny Rice: Thank you for the clarification.

Clare Báez: We're just used to the outside one.

Danny Rice: Okay.

Armondo Báez: We made like an outside shower in the summer and I eventually just ended up using like a jug, a gallon jug-

Clare Báez: Like two gallon jugs.

Armondo Báez: Of water and usually I try to just use like-

Clare Báez: That's it.

Armondo Báez: A one gallon jug for the whole shower and just that you realize-

Clare Báez: I couldn't get there, I had to use two. I used two, not one.

Armondo Báez: No, actually I take that back. Yeah, it was two. I think it was two for the most part. You realize when you take the showers how much water use, not because you're like noting it and taking it down, but you have just two gallon jugs and you're-

Danny Rice: Just you're actually seeing it.

Clare Báez: Yeah.

Danny Rice: Yeah, instead of just turning on the faucet.

Armondo Báez: Right. I take just insanely long showers when I'm in town. It' like just-

Clare Báez: Just living it up. Living it up in that indoor bathroom.

Armondo Báez: I mean like before our experience, like I always take long, just because it's a nice, relaxing time. It's like I'll spend 20 minutes. I know it's a lot.

Danny Rice: Do you find, and this might be a personal question, but do you find that that impacts how often you do the activities that require those resources?

Clare Báez: Are you asking how many times a week we take a shower?

Danny Rice: Kind of.

Clare Báez: Like less.

Danny Rice: Do you find that you shower less often?

Clare Báez: Less than when we lived in town.

Danny Rice: Okay.

Armondo Báez: Yeah.

Clare Báez: Definitely.

Armondo Báez: Yeah, it's much-

Clare Báez: Also because it's like weather related. You've got to wait to you have a nice day because you're outside.

Danny Rice: Because you're outside. Yeah.

Clare Báez: Because you're outside. On the other hand now that internship is over and we're back in town, I really, really, really miss the outside bathroom like a lot.

Danny Rice: Really?

Clare Báez: Oh yeah. I much prefer that.

Danny Rice: May I ask why?

Clare Báez: It's just nice to like be outside and be taking a shower. When was the last time you did that? Maybe never.

Danny Rice: Maybe never. Yeah.

Clare Báez: Maybe never. It's really freeing and it just feels good to be outside when it's the sun shining on you while you're taking a shower. It's lovely.

Armondo Báez: Also like trash and recycling and food scraps like we noticed how many, because we basically had tons more vegetables that we're eating, so we noticed the food scraps that we're, because we had just a compost pile that we throw the scraps on, so we noticed how much we're using. If we're town like you just throw it in the trash for the most part.

Clare Báez: Yeah, it feels so weird to put food in the trash now, because we never did.

Armondo Báez: Yeah.

Clare Báez: We had composted before when we were in town, but like this was even more.

Danny Rice: Were you the only people contributing to-

Clare Báez: Oh no, no the other interns did compost too.

Danny Rice: I'm sure it was quite a bit.

Armondo Báez: Oh yeah.

Clare Báez: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah we had two big, huge like, what are those things that they built them out of? Was it pallets?

Armondo Báez: Pallets. Yeah. Pallets.

Clare Báez: Yeah.

Danny Rice: Oh, yeah.

Clare Báez: It was like a three sided pallet and then like another one that was full.

Armondo Báez: Yeah.

Danny Rice: Wow.

Armondo Báez: Yeah.

Danny Rice: That segues nicely into what have been some of the reactions that you've gotten telling people that this is what you've been doing and what have been some of the questions that people will ask?

Clare Báez: Kind of a scope of like, "Oh, that's interesting," but you can kind of tell that they don't really think it's interesting, all the way to like, "Wow, tell me more about it, I want to know more" or "Like I've been interested in it. I've gotten a lot of comments about like, oh, that's on HGTV, I think, like the "Tiny Homes." You guys should be on the "Tiny Homes." Yeah.

Armondo Báez: I didn't really get any, I was working.

Clare Báez: Yeah, Armondo was working like 14 hours a day.

Armondo Báez: Yeah.

Clare Báez: The vegetables didn't tell him anything.

Danny Rice: Well so working outside, did you spend a lot of time in the tiny house and then-

Armondo Báez: See that's the thing, not really, because it was mainly for dinner and then sleeping and then I was always leaving really early and coming back late, so for the most part most of the day it was Clare and the kids.

Danny Rice: Opposite question, did you find that you were spending more time outside or more time inside?

Clare Báez: Absolutely. No, we spent as much time outside as possible, because I think I would've gone crazy otherwise.

Danny Rice: Yeah. This has been a common answer that I've heard from many people who have lived in tiny houses. One of the things that they like most about the experience was that it all but forces you to spend more time outside. The outdoors are not always agreeable though. What did you do in bad weather?

Clare Báez: We either stayed inside or since my parents and Armondo's parents live in town we would maybe come into town and like hang out at someone's house or go somewhere or take the kids somewhere or go to the library there by the bus in one of the small towns or go to the coffee shop, something like that.

Danny Rice: Would you recommend this experience to other people who are interested?

Armondo Báez: She actually did not recommend it.

Clare Báez: Other people with kids or without kids?

Danny Rice: Ooh, yeah, you tell me.

Clare Báez: Because I would say differently.

Danny Rice: Okay.

Clare Báez: Without kids, absolutely. With kids, maybe.

Danny Rice: Maybe? Okay.

Clare Báez: It depends on-

Armondo Báez: Yeah, it depends.

Clare Báez: Your family and your parenting style and if this would be something you'd be interested in or not, because I know, like I know of a lot of other people who live with kids and they live in even smaller things, like one of those conversion vans with kids. I mean that's like teeny tiny. I think it would depend, but while we were there we had a couple, our friends, who have two kids, two boys who are like the same age as our kids, and they were debating between living in a school bus and buying the house that they currently lived in and I told them they should buy the house.

Danny Rice: Good to know.

Clare Báez: Yeah.

Armondo Báez: Well, yeah, it's, I think, so different when you have kids that are that age, and ours, let's see, when we started one and four, so like it's just the movement is just crazy and they're rapidly growing and it's-

Clare Báez: Yeah, they're running up and down the bus, like from one end to the other.

Armondo Báez: If the kids were different ages or something, but like you have these two just like very energetic little people that are just flying around there.

Clare Báez: Well and I think, like Armondo and I talked about this, because we've had lots of conversations about living in it and what we thought about it and all that and our reactions to it and I kind of realize that it wasn't the space inside the bus that was the problem, and we kind of talked about this earlier too, it was the fact that there wasn't a community there of other people with kids.

I feel like if there had been many families living there, in whatever kind of structure they lived in, and everybody had like a communal space where they met and people really did things together, like food prep and whatever daily chores together that it would've made a huge difference. I think that it would've been a different experience for us, because, yeah, it wasn't a lack of space, it was the lack of community around what we're doing that really made it feel isolated.

Danny Rice: There's one take on the tiny house issue, but there are those that don't see tiny houses as an alternative, but instead see them as a viable solution to an age old problem. We'll have more after our break. If you're anything like me you love a good webinar. Whether I'm looking for training on professional development or I'm trying to learn a new skill or even, say, I don't know, how to record and edit a podcast, lynda.com always has the perfect video tutorials for my needs. You can even get a project management certification just by tracking your progress through lynda.com.

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In recent years there's been a makeshift task force that has begun working with the City of Bloomington to reshape some of our zoning laws to provide space for tiny houses specifically meant for those in need. Some of the members of this task force were the ones who lead the library program that I mentioned earlier and we were able to meet with Mike Robinson, who is also a contributing member of this task force. We've talked about how this can be a solution for the homeless population, what's been your experience with that so far?

Mike Robinson: Pretty poor.

Danny Rice: Is that right?

Mike Robinson: Oh yeah. We're waiting for the city to rezone the whole zoning program at the city and then come this spring they're supposed to have it done and then we can go from there to find out exactly where we're going to put the tiny houses after they're finished being built, whether it be in the city or on the edge of city.

Danny Rice: Are there any legal hurdles that are unique to tiny homes?

Mike Robinson: Yes and the main-

Danny Rice: And I don't expect you to be an expert on these.

Mike Robinson: Well this part I am.

Danny Rice: Oh, good, good.

Mike Robinson: When we first started building the tiny house we actually didn't know what to expect. We didn't know what we had to put into it, where we were going to put it, what we were going to do with it, so I went to the city and talked to the inspectors or the people in charge to find out what do they want us to do. Well they shrugged their shoulders because they'd never experienced it either, so the two of us and the city decided to build it just like a home, with the same codes. I'm a general contractor, so I knew what the codes were supposed to be and that's what we did. We have plumbing, heating and electrical in it, with plenty of insulation on the top, bottom, and all the sides and able to travel down the road at preferably less than 75 miles an hour.

The latest thing is ... Well, there is no latest thing, because it's just going to keep on going. The latest thing is the fact that it can't be on wheels. It has to be on a concrete pad, so we're just waiting now basically for the zoning and task force that has been brought forth to find out exactly where we're going to put them, how many we can put on a city lot and what part of town can they be on and possibly a commune, community, with all the utilities, which need to be put in for water, electrical and plumbing, heating.

Danny Rice: About how many square feet would you say?

Mike Robinson: Well that's the other thing that we're waiting to find out from the city, what they want to do. The one we have is 156, say, 160 square feet, and that includes the first floor and with a loft for, we made it for sleeping and you have a loft for whatever you want to do. You've got about three to four feet of headroom, so if you want to play cards up there you can play cards, but-

Danny Rice: It would be cozy.

Mike Robinson: Oh, it would be very cozy.

Danny Rice: Yeah.

Mike Robinson: Yeah, but our loft is seven feet by seven feet by three and a half feet in the middle and we're on an angle, the roof is not a regular roof, so it goes downhill pretty fast. The downstairs it has a front porch, a living room, a dining room, which is connected with the living room, with a drop down table. It has a kitchen with a countertop sink, with water running, hot water and cold water. We have electrical with plugins. We have upper cabinets. We have a cabinet for clothes hanging. We have a utility closet for the water heater and the electrical. There's another room right behind that and that has a toilet in it, full size toilet with running water and also a shower in it.

Danny Rice: Do you know how big the lot is that you have on it right now?

Mike Robinson: Currently we don't have a lot.

Danny Rice: Okay.

Mike Robinson: We don't know what the city's going to come up with. We don't even have a position or a situation or a location to put a tiny house. We have the possibility of some acreage or a lot or something, we don't know what it is for sure yet, but we're working on it. We turned all this over to a task force at the city and they're checking everything out in the different cities where there are others to find out the ramifications that they went through and how to get it through here.

I mean the city is excited about having it done, not only for their homeless, but also just for the fact that they can wave their flag that we have a place for the homeless in our city. There's only a few in the United States. I say a few, probably 10, but we're the first ones in Illinois, to the best of my knowledge, that have a tiny house, where we're trying to make a place for them.

Danny Rice: Where did this idea first come from?

Mike Robinson: Well I could say television, but honestly I don't know how far ... It goes back to somebody wanted to do it, they went to somebody else and somebody else got a grant for it to happen, so we were off and running to build it. We had people from all over. We started building at IWU and then because the school year was starting we had to move it over and we moved over to First Christian Church, down by the downtown, on Jefferson and Lee and Monroe. We finished building it down there. What we're doing is taking it to different locations for a week and they can keep it themselves, let people of their own to go through there. We've had it at Holy Trinity Catholic Church down there on Chestnut and Main, Locust and Main, and then we've had it at the synagogue on Towanda Avenue.

Danny Rice: This is just to give people a chance to see it out, kind of see a real life example of the type of structure that you're imagining.

Mike Robinson: Exactly. We had at the library we had an extremely good turnout for the people that came here. There was over 75 people and we brought the trailer over here and they had the opportunity to go through it and they oohed and aah-ed and everybody had a different opinion as to how it could've been done, but that's what we want, people to put their two cents worth in. Where women design a little bit better than or differently than what men do, so they gave us some good ideas.

Danny Rice: That's outstanding.

Mike Robinson: Yeah. As far as what we're going to do with the homeless, there's so many things that we just don't know about who can live in it. We know we have to stay within the boundaries of law for people, whoever they may be, that live there and we have to figure out who's going to pay for it, who's going to upkeep it, who's going to pay the utilities, who's going to maintain it? Those are all the questions that have not been answered yet, but we wanted to, but now that the city's taken over politics is a different avenue.

Danny Rice: Yeah, but there are people who are working to try to figure out these solutions.

Mike Robinson: Oh yeah, they've got a regular task force going and they can come up with all the answers that we need, because they're rewriting the zoning laws in Bloomington, just to accommodate tiny homes and I have no idea what the size is going to be, locations.

Danny Rice: It's still being figured out.

Mike Robinson: Right.

Danny Rice: Besides the logistical consideration of actual space, what are some of the benefits to this type of residence versus like a shelter like the Salvation Army?

Mike Robinson: Well the shelters are full at this time, especially in the winter time, and this would be great for the homeless. The majority of the homeless are pretty migrant, if they get the notion to move they'll just pack up their bag and head out for wherever they might want to go. They don't even know sometimes where they're going when they leave. We've had the opportunity to be close with them and learn some of the things that they do and so forth.

It would be beneficial for them, for instance, in the last several years we've had some severe winters and the people survived the cold we had year before last in tents and the tents were just soaking wet and so they were soaking wet on the inside and they're using little Sterno cans or a small fire to keep themselves comfortable, but that's where the tiny home comes in. It's really nice, I mean it's got a heater in it. It's got an air conditioner.

Danny Rice: And the basic amenities. Things that-

Mike Robinson: Exactly.

Danny Rice: Yeah.

Mike Robinson: Everything that's in a home is in this trailer or I mean tiny home.

Danny Rice: Yeah. If you don't mind my asking, about how much does one cost to kind of from start to finish?

Mike Robinson: Well we did everything that would regularly be done to that we would like to live in and were donated a trailer, which would've been \$2,500, and then we spent \$7,500 in materials, so basically 10 to 11,000.

Danny Rice: Sure.

Mike Robinson: You wouldn't think that from a small trailer like that, but it did. It's just so many little things that add up, just like when we build houses today, those houses, you'd be surprised, they might cost a \$150 or \$250,000, but nobody's making a big bundle of money on them, because they can't out price them so they have to keep the price down, and that's the same thing we try to do, kind of, but we wanted to do it right. We have R-30 in the ceiling and the floor, we have R-19 in the walls for insulation and that's really heavy. This area is scheduled for R-13 in the walls and R-42 in the ceiling, but that's when you have a big attic above it and we're open on the inside, so we have the insulation all the way around.

Danny Rice: Yeah. How would you encourage someone to embrace this idea, to get involved in helping this movement get up and running?

Mike Robinson: That's a good question. Right today everywhere we've been taking the trailer, it's not a trailer, it's a tiny home, is people to ask the questions and they say, "Boy, we'd like to build one of those. Wow, we'd like to build," so I've told everybody that I would help them get started and fill out some of the questions that they might have and so forth so that that church group or school group or clubs, a Kiwanis or Knights of Columbus, anybody, would be willing to get together with their own people, volunteers, to build it.

That's what we did, we had volunteers from IWU, churches, many, multiple churches, so that's how we got it built. That's what I would recommend, is churches get involved with wanting to help the homeless people and to build a tiny home. When they come back in the spring I'm pretty sure that we're going to be able to build the home either on a concrete pad or somewhere where we can get it to the concrete pad, wherever it's going to be.

Danny Rice: What other pieces of advice would you give to people?

Mike Robinson: I would like to see people get involved in either building their own from their group or helping somebody else do it, because it's not an easy, it looks easy, it's

small, but it takes a lot of people and a lot of time, especially when you're volunteers, you don't have time to be there eight hours or 10 hours a day, so the weekends sometimes, one or two days, and that's about it. I'd really like to see everybody get involved and try to help this situation move on.

Danny Rice:

Mike wanted me to reiterate that he is certainly not the only person working on this; there's an entire team dedicated to figuring this out. Well that's all the time we have this month. If you enjoyed, you can subscribe on iTunes or Android or wherever else you get podcast. If not, please keep it to yourself. The Báez family plans to have their skoolie at the Illinois Sustainability Expo at Illinois Wesleyan University on Saturday, April 8th. You can, and should, follow Clare and Armondo on Instagram and Facebook. They are at rogue carrots, that's R-O-G-U-E C-A-R-R-O-T-S, and their website is roguecarrots.com. It's a very fun follow, so give it a look.

Thanks for listening to Shelf Understanding (singing). Songs from this month's episode were "Exiles" and "Czechered Pyjamas" off of the Amy Denio album, "Tongues," and "Strange Dream," off of the self titled album by [Kinnay 00:42:13]. Acquired on magnatune.com Magnatune, we are not evil.

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