

Home/Away
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“Home/Away”

Project Summary

My project for CRWR 590, collaboration between the Creative Writing Department and the Social Ecological Economic Development Studies Sustainability Program, is titled “Home/Away.” The project combines narratives, based on interviews with UBC students who have arrived in Canada as political refugees, with custom-built birdhouses. Key to the project are the concepts of “refuge,” “home,” and “identity.”

The narratives are constructed from excerpts of in-person and phone interviews with current and former UBC students, who arrived at UBC or in Canada as political refugees, from South Sudan, Rwanda, and Croatia, respectively. The interviews focused on each of the students’ own journeys and experiences, their ideas of “home” and “refuge,” and on their connections to UBC, Vancouver, and Canada. The interviews ran from twenty to forty-five minutes, while the final narratives number roughly one hundred words each. Also included is a short, personal narrative of my own, detailing my experience with people who have arrived in Canada from elsewhere.

The narratives are displayed on a sign at the base of a large tree, at the nexus of the Buchanan B and C buildings; the sign also draws a connection to the birdhouse components, which are hung in the tree above. There are five colour-coded, species-specific birdhouses, designed by myself and Eric Douglas, meant to house five different species of nesting birds commonly found on the UBC campus: wren, chickadee, finch, flicker, and sparrow. The houses are both intended to act as symbolic representations of “homes” or “refuges,” and to function as usable homes for birds.

The project was driven by my desire to explore UBC as place of refuge and home-away-from-home for both humans and animals, using both the campus’ natural beauty and the idea of a university campus as a micro-society, as additional inspirations. The concept was refined through the workshop process with my CRWR 590 classmates, as well as through conversations with Timothy Taylor, Michael Peterson, Liska Richer, Eric Douglas, and others. Because the interviews were largely unscripted, the direction of the narratives owes largely to my interview subjects, and the topics they chose to discuss.

My hope is that the “Home/Away” will encourage people in the UBC community to explore their own ideas of “home” and “refuge,” to think about their own connections to the natural environment, and to engage with those around them, uncovering the stories that make each member of the community unique.