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"It Was Very Beautiful:" Roberto's Story

Honduran immigrant shares his powerful story of finding support in his asylum journey.



By CAPAS staff on May 28, 2025

When people fleeing persecution in their home country make the arduous journey to find safety in the United States, their struggles are far from over when they cross the border. Although seeking asylum is a human right, the process of obtaining legal asylum is fraught with many hurdles and a low probability of success. The United States government has

intentionally put numerous barriers in the way of asylum-seekers, creating a situation that neither alleviates trauma nor offers a welcoming start for those who have newly arrived.

Fact: The overall success rate for those who apply for asylum is only 37 percent, and many asylum-seekers wait many years before their case is heard.

Several factors can affect the outcome of an application; whether someone has legal representation and whether they are being detained are two of the most influential factors. While they wait for their case to be heard, asylum-seekers must rely on frequently delayed work permits in order to work legally, face restrictions on getting driver's licenses, have trouble finding housing due to a lack of rental history and credit, incur massive medical bills because they lack insurance, and are often ineligible for public benefits.

But through the **Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum-Seekers (CAPAS)**, UUs throughout the country are working with asylum-seekers to change this narrative. In Idaho, the Boise UU Fellowship has accompanied Roberto on his journey and together have created a story of celebration.

In 2018, four members of the Boise UU Fellowship (BUUF) and their minister, the Rev. Sara LaWall, traveled to the southern border to witness the conditions faced by asylum-seekers. They then felt inspired to take action and spent the next few months going through a detailed discernment process with CAPAS staff. They decided to sponsor an asylum-seeker and began planning and raising funds.

In late 2019, CAPAS received a referral for a man named Roberto*, who escaped a life-threatening situation in Honduras and was then kidnapped along with his boyfriend in Mexico. He witnessed the murder of his boyfriend and was brutally attacked himself. After coming to the U.S. border, he was held in detention, where he had limited access to legal counsel and his massive injuries and medical needs were not being properly cared for. He desperately needed to be released.

BUUF answered the call! They developed a relationship with Roberto while he was in detention and set up a commissary account to help with necessities. They then learned that an asylum hearing was scheduled and were advised by a legal advocate that he needed to get out of detention before that hearing so that they could ask for a change of venue and

receive a new hearing date, giving them more time to prepare his case. A bail hearing was then scheduled for the day before the asylum hearing. They had 24 hours to convince a judge to release him, post the bail, and work with the attorney to file the change of venue. The bail hearing was held remotely at a court in Miami, and one member of the BUUF team flew to Miami and rallied several other local UUs to join her at his hearing as a show of support. BUUF's minister and the lawyer advocate flew to Louisiana, where Roberto was being detained. Other members of the BUUF team went to their local ICE office to figure out the procedures for posting bail. Thanks to the advocacy and logistical prowess of all involved, bail was posted and Roberto was released from detention just before the detention center closed for the day. Two days later, he was warmly welcomed in Boise by BUUF congregants.

Roberto then began the process of settling in. He developed a close relationship with this housing host and several others on the asylum support team, who helped him develop ties to the community. He fixed up a donated bike so that he could explore his new neighborhood and began English classes. He connected with local LGBTQ groups and began volunteering at a local homeless shelter. He began to get his medical and dental needs addressed at a federally qualified health center.

About one month after he arrived in Boise—and just when things seemed to be going well—ICE knocked on Roberto's housing host's door and said that his bond had been rescinded by a judge. The judge used reports of an erroneous charge in Honduras to have Roberto taken back into custody. He was eventually transferred to a detention center in Tacoma, Washington. After he was assaulted in detention, he was released by ICE in the middle of the night to avoid attention. He was picked up by the local UU minister who helped him get to the airport to return to Boise.

Eventually, Roberto received a work permit and took food safety classes. He began working for Meals on Wheels and eventually became the head of their local kitchen. He eventually decided to start a roofing business and took a business plan writing course with one of his sponsors from the congregation.

In April 2022, Roberto had his asylum hearing. It was a grueling day with awful questioning by the government attorney, who tried to paint him as a dangerous person who was faking being gay. And, yet, justice prevailed. Three years after he fled danger in Honduras, Roberto was granted asylum by the immigration judge! He became one of the first asylum-seekers in the CAPAS program to win asylum! "When I heard 'You won!', I started to scream and cry—it was very beautiful!" said Roberto, describing that celebratory moment.

When asked about his experience working with the Boise congregation, Roberto said, "I have met many wonderful people who love me without being blood family. I got a wonderful family!"

Having the support of a CAPAS congregation can make a significant difference in the life of an asylum-seeker and in the potential outcome of their request for asylum. Your congregation is needed now more than ever to create more stories of welcome. To learn about becoming a CAPAS congregation, please visit uusc.org/capas.

**Name changed to protect the asylum-seeker's privacy.*

Photo credit: CAPAS

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