

Home is where you place your heart.

TEXT BY REVEREND TONY MARCIANO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CHARLOTTE RESCUE MISSION

My wife and I always comment that we don't remember our 30s. When we discuss it, we both pause and look at each other and wonder what happened during that period of our lives.

I calculated that from age 29-39, we moved 10 times (no, that is not a typo—ten times). I won't bore you with why we moved from location to location. I will say it was very unsettling. 1996 was a turning point in our lives.

Prior to moving to Charlotte, I spent three years in Washington, DC as Executive Director of a Rescue Mission. In the winter, I had a 3 ½ hour commute. When the offer came to come to Charlotte in 1996, a friend told me it is a great place to raise a family. I was thrilled. I only had one problem; where is Charlotte, NC? Twenty years ago, Charlotte was being confused with Charlottesville, VA or Charleston, SC. Today, that's a different story.

I quickly found Charlotte to be home. Within my first few months of arriving, my sister came to visit and I gave her a tour of uptown Charlotte. I showed her the artist rendering of the Hornets players on the side of the First Union building—remember those days? I was so very grateful to be here.

Eighteen months after coming to Charlotte, my mother came to live with my family. We were three generations living under the same roof (think of the Waltons). A few years later, my sister joined us here. A few years after that, my other sister came here to live here as well.

When I was two months into my job as Executive Director of Charlotte Rescue Mission, a co-worker and I went to visit a donor. We rang the doorbell. She greeted my co-worker, opened the screen door and invited her into her house. I was still standing on the porch. She looked at my co-worker and said, "Is this the Yankee?" Then she turned to me (remember, she's inside the house and I am outside on the porch with a screen door between the two of us) and said, "So how long are you going to stay?" At that point, a 3 ½ hour commute was looking really good.

I knew what she was saying. Charlotte is not a major market such as DC or even New York City where I grew up on the Jersey side. If I did a good job, was she thinking I saw Charlotte as a stepping stone for a promotion to a larger and more "prestigious" market?

Something happens when you come to Charlotte. It feels like home because it is home. I have watched families raise their children who go away to college and then after graduation take a job in New York or Chicago for a few years. They don't plan to stay there. Instead, they come "home" to Charlotte because this is where they want to raise their family.

It has been said that "Home is where you place your hat." Would you mind if I modify that for a moment? I prefer to say, "Home is where you place your heart." You can go from city to city chasing jobs, but jobs will come and go. I marvel that a few years after someone leaves a company, the new hires don't even know this person existed. Build your life around the people who can share your life, your stories, your heart, because home is where you place your heart. ■

Rev. Tony Marciano is the Executive Director of the Charlotte Rescue Mission. The Charlotte Rescue Mission provides a free long term Christian recovery program for men and women who are addicted to drugs and alcohol. For more information, visit our website at www.charlotterescuemission.org.

