# Home Is Where the Parking Lot Is [Op-Docs](https://www.nytimes.com/column/op-docs) By LANCE OPPENHEIM SEPT. 6, 2016



Taking a back-road shortcut to catch a flight from Los Angeles two years ago, I passed an obscure airline employee parking lot — and was surprised to see over 70 motor homes. It looked like there was an entire community planted right there in the parking lot of the airport. I wondered, who lived there — and why?

I learned that this community was an employee parking lot turned motor-home park made up of pilots, flight attendants and mechanics. And I became fascinated by why and how the residents — people who may have flown us across the country, or walked us through emergency landing procedures — came to inhabit such an unusual place.

When I returned there last December, it quickly became apparent that the lot rarely attracted visitors, especially those carrying cameras. Residents did not immediately embrace me — a student filmmaker. So I was grateful when a few of them decided to share their takes on their unique living situation with me — and was struck by the contradictions in how they view their homes. While many communities seem to confer on their residents a sense of stability, those at the employee parking lot today generally view their homes as temporary. But if a home is traditionally considered a place where one yearns to return to — a place where the heart is, so to speak — can a temporary dwelling be a home?

Their perspectives are rooted in their community’s complicated history. The lot was created at least a decade ago as an airport-sponsored program offering airline employees a place to rest before heading to their next destination. Today, however, the next destination for many of the lot’s residents is unknown. As a result of pursuing their dream of working in the aviation industry, with its attendant transient lifestyle, many of the parking lot’s residents are estranged from their families. They are largely a community of people living alone, together — and most now consider the lot “home.” But airport officials do not necessarily share their enthusiasm. Instead, they are actively seeking ways to re-appropriate the space where the community is situated and have slowly, and steadily, reduced the number of its residents.

I hope this film will help expand and challenge traditional views of what constitutes a home in 21st-century America. Because as unconventional as their living situation may be, the residents of this airport parking lot told me their homes afford them something we all seek: freedom.

Lance Oppenheim is a director and editor who attends Harvard. His work with a nonprofit, the Opp-Guide, has been exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution and film festivals.