



# Habitat for Humanity

## By Julian Brelsford

One of the things I've found while working with Habitat for Humanity is that it can be hard to find things out about Habitat. People are highly committed to getting homes built for the people who need them, though sometimes with Habitat's decentralized structure it's hard to find someone who knows what's going on and has time to explain. Also, since most people working with Habitat are volunteers, they all (surprise, surprise!) have plenty of other things to do. With Habitat, it's common to hear sound bites about this and that, but it's sometimes more difficult to get a personal story. But many of the personal stories are very inspiring.

During my three years as a student in Montreal, I had a couple of great opportunities to participate in Habitat for Humanity activities. One year, I spent my spring break in the suburbs of New York City with other McGill University students. We were participating in "Collegiate Challenge," where groups of university students from

around North America work on Habitat houses across the continent. In New York, we spent a lot of our time sawing pre-insulated wall-sections into appropriately-sized pieces. (The wall sections needed to be eight feet tall, but the ones we were sawing were 10 feet by 4 feet, and 16 by 4.) I really enjoyed the chance to do something so different from my normal routine, and my fellow house-builders were great fun to be with. (Though maybe a little bit less so when they decided to play loud and dramatic "Lord of the Rings" music to wake us up early in the morning.)

Even better than getting to traipse off on a cold spring day to saw boards was getting to help build a house in Montreal and to learn a lot about what brought the future homeowner, Nicole, to apply for a Habitat house. Montreal has many people with low income in need of affordable housing, but it would be hard to find a more deserving homeowner than Nicole. Nicole has three daughters who were ages 24, 14, and 8. They were living in

a two-bedroom apartment and she was working at three jobs to make ends meet. At one point she had gotten sick and gone to a doctor, who said her problem was that she was working too much.

I think one of the things about Habitat for Humanity is that it's a great place to find some of the most wonderful friends in the world. It's not just anybody that will give up their valuable free time to help people they don't know. It's generally people that have a good heart and are good at thinking beyond their own little part of the world and their personal comfort. As many Quakers have been saying for a long time, there is in fact a wonderful reward in satisfaction from doing things for others, and in Habitat for Humanity part of that reward is being able to do it with like-minded people. \*

*Julian Brelsford grew up in Anchorage Friends Meeting in Alaska. He attended Montreal Monthly Meeting from 2002-2004 while he was a student at McGill. He currently attends Reading Friends Meeting in Pennsylvania.*

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