



**Joshua House Fund**  
 Building Houses, Changing Lives  
 P.O. Box 1792  
 Darien, CT 06820

Like us on:



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**Come join us!**  
**Saturday, November 4th at the**  
**Nature Center in Darien**

Help celebrate Joshua House Fund's 20th anniversary of building homes for families in need. Mark your calendars and when the time comes, mosey on down and kick up your heels. For tickets and information, go to [joshuahousefund.org](http://joshuahousefund.org).

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JOSHUA HOUSE FUND

# Building Journal



*Building Houses, Changing Lives*

*2017 marks the 20th anniversary of the Joshua House Fund. It's been a long road since our humble beginnings back in 1997 for this small, 100% volunteer, non-profit organization that was created to address the lack of adequate housing for impoverished families in McCreary County, Kentucky, one of America's poorest regions.*

*We'd like to take a moment to thank all of you, our volunteers and donors who have made this possible. If you served on a committee, addressed envelopes, made hors d'oeuvres for a fundraiser or most importantly, financially supported the Joshua House Fund, we are truly grateful for your support. You are the foundation of this organization and without you, there would be 26 fewer families without a place to call home. Thank you.*

*Top Left: Jaxon and Bennett McDermott  
 Bottom Right: Jeff McKee and Caroline Andren*

## My Memory from Kentucky

*Bennett McDermott*



I first went up to her to thank her for the delicious meal she had made for us, however before I could speak she took my hand and said "thank you from the bottom of my heart". This moment made me realize how grateful they were for us to come build a home for a family that truly needs one.

This June I traveled to Kentucky with a group of teens to build a house for a young boy named Jaxon, and his family. Jaxon kept me smiling and excited to come back to the construction site every day. At first, he was shy and didn't really have interest in talking to us, however as the days went on he began to open himself up and interact with us. Jaxon's life gave me a new perspective on my life. He had so much fun just running in the yard and playing with simple toys like a soccer ball and a stick. He was easily entertained and always smiling and laughing. His positive spirit put everyone in a good mood.

One thing I remember from the trip to Kentucky was when I first met Diana who made lunch for all of us every single day.

My trip to Kentucky was a life changing experience. I recommend this trip to anyone who has the chance to go on it because it gives an intense understanding of other people's lives around our country. This trip made us appreciate what we have and not to get upset over the little things. I will always remember Jaxon, Diana and the incredible experience I had in Kentucky.



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## Getting to Know the Clark Family

*Evelyn Shashy*

As Americans we are united in our deep thanks and respect for members of our armed forces who have served our country. On rare occasions, we are actually able to thank them in person for their service. During this summer's Joshua House Fund building project, 15 of us had the privilege of giving back, in a material and spiritual way, to a wounded Army Ranger and his



*Hillary and Allen Clark signing their new home.*

family. Allen Clark, and his wife (Hillary), step-son, Jaxon, and daughter Brooklyn, were the recipients of this year's home in McCreary County, KY.

As an Army veteran, myself, I found that I was able to have several quiet conversations with Allen. Although we did not share the same length of service or combat experience, we did have a common military vocabulary and unspoken understanding of military service. Allen spent four tours of his distinguished military career (15 years, in total) in Iraq and Afghanistan. I had the opportunity to learn more about the nature of Allen's war-time experience working side by side with him on the house, along with the rest of the Joshua House volunteer group. He is a shy, reserved gentleman by nature. He readily admits he is wary of strangers and is hypersensitive to changes in his environment, as a result of his combat experience. Hyper-vigilance of people and surroundings is what kept Allen alive for nearly 12 years in a war zone. He was a part of an elite squad of special operators, Army Rangers, whose daily mission varied, but was most assuredly at the "tip of the spear" in terms

of combat operations. Allen was involved in countless fire fights, saw dear friends and fellow soldiers injured and killed, and ultimately was severely injured himself from an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast. So much of what happened during his overseas tours he is not able to discuss. Some of the atrocities he could discuss are too awful to recount. Suffice it to say, Allen deserves our heartfelt thanks and understanding.

Allen spent months in Army hospitals learning to walk and talk again. His traumatic brain injury is an invisible curse that continues to make every day life a challenge. The fact that he could participate so fully in the building of his home seemed miraculous. His positive and energetic presence on the project were very motivational to us all. I will be forever grateful that I could help this man and his sweet



family. This year's house build was unique in that it involved a wounded warrior. There are so many others however, in McCreary County, that are wounded. Addiction, unemployment, and disability have rendered hundreds in Allen's community in great need. Lending a hand to help a wounded family out of despair is what Joshua House delivers year after year. My son George and I were so lucky to have a small role in this year's effort. The entire experience for us truly mirrored the Joshua House Fund's motto of **building houses and changing lives**, ours included.



*Top: Ryan Eppley, Bennett McDermott, Henry Foster and George Shashy  
Middle: Allison McDermott, Evelyn Shashy, Maeve Zamsky and Annie McKee  
Bottom: Application Day  
Left: Allen raising a flag on his new home*



*Nashville based, singer-songwriter, Doug Allen performing a concert.*

“To see someone be so selfless as to give up an opportunity to receive a new house was alien to me.”

## My Joshua House Experience

*Henry Foster*



*Henry Foster*

At the beginning of my trip, I thought my Joshua House experience in Kentucky would open my eyes to a different culture and way of life from Darien and would be filled with pity. But this trip showed me that this community in Kentucky, that is indeed in need of help, is the most wholesome and selfless community I have ever come across.

In the middle of the trip on a Wednesday afternoon after a particularly hot day on the building site, we were told that instead of going to the pool and relaxing at the hotel, we would be going to an outdoor concert forty minutes away with the workers, their families, and other members of the community. I piled into the car with two other underwhelmingly

next three hours, we played in a simple, blissful manner that I had not experienced in the longest time. With only a football, a field, and some monkey bars, these Kentucky kids had so much fun making up games and just playing. This simple experience showed me how they could be so happy with so little because of their wholesome community.

The next day, we were in charge of helping out on Application Day. It was a simple job. We gave prospective home recipients an application, helped them fill it out, made copies, and introduced them to a board member to be interviewed. I was able to interact with a few people during this process. One lady got out of her car, she looked around and a troubled look spread across her face. She called for her two kids to get back in the car so I went over, introduced myself, and asked if anything was wrong. She pointed to another woman who she knew and proceeded to tell me about the woman's dire financial situation.

“It would just be cruel if I applied, got the house, and she didn't,” the woman exclaimed. Although this prospective applicant would have benefited from a new home, she did not apply because she believed that someone else needed it more than she did. I was throttled. To see someone be so selfless as to give up an



*2017 Trip participants were (left to right): Annie McKee, Jeff McKee, Maeve Zamsky, Emma Webb, Kevin Treesh, Caroline Andren, Graham Foster, Ryan Eppley, Bennett McDermott, Allison McDermott, Henry Foster, Lynne Andren, Lisa Morrill Webb, and Kent Eppley. Not Shown: Doug Allen, Martin Milewski, Evelyn and George Shashy*

enthusied rising sophomores, and our parents. As we arrived, we saw a humble stage, fifty-or-so foldable chairs, a large field, and a playground, scattered with children of all ages. Because the concert had not started, I started throwing a football around with my friends from Connecticut. Soon enough one of the kids from Kentucky asked if they could throw as well. We said, “yes” and about five minutes later, 15 or so more kids joined in. For the

opportunity to receive a new house was alien to me. My definition of selflessness was giving up a week of my summer to work on a house in Kentucky. To give up the possibility of an entire house was not selfless but saint-like, even a bit crazy. As I persuaded her to apply for a new home, I realized that the McCreary County community as a whole benefits from the homes Joshua House builds every year, not just the family that lives in it.

# 1997 - 2017

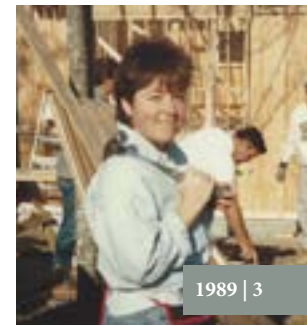
## From Humble Beginnings. The Story of the Joshua House Fund.



1994 | 1



2002 | 2



1989 | 3



2012 | 4



2008 | 5



2013 | 6



1994



1989



1996



2003



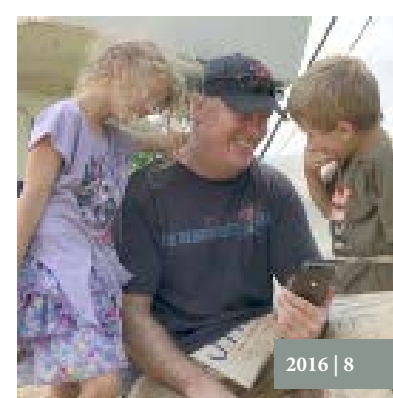
1995



2004 | 7



2015



2016 | 8



2004



2014

This small, unassuming, private, 100% volunteer, non-profit organization started off as a church youth group working with a low-profile order of nuns, the Sisters of St. Joseph. It was 1986, and the pastor of St. Thomas More Church in Darien, Connecticut, Father Edward Howley learned of the Sisters' desperate struggle to help people living in squalid conditions in one of the poorest areas in the United States, the part of Kentucky known as Appalachia.

After mobilizing volunteers, making phone calls asking the parish for support, Father Howley, Bonnie McCurdy, Zita O'Brian,

the Religious Education Director, and a small contingent of teenagers traveled to Whitley City, Kentucky and built the first house for a struggling young family.

This effort, which became known as the Appalachia Project, continued successfully producing more than twelve houses, as well as many additions and improvements to other homes, all while providing a profound experience for hundreds of Darien teenagers.

One of Father's greatest attributes was his vision. In 1997, as his time grew closer

to retirement, he wanted a way for this project, which by this time was embedded in the life of the parish, to continue. He knew that the last thing an incoming pastor needed was the pressure of the significant fundraising efforts required to afford the next house. In what seemed a stroke of inspiration, he put together a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which he called "Joshua House" ("Joshua" is a translated form of the name Jesus), and staffed it with adult parishioners, one of whom had been on the very first trip to Kentucky as a teenager.

As part of the church, Joshua House thrived. Robust fundraising soon enabled two houses to be built each summer, affording many more the opportunity to be part of this amazing experience. Five years later in 2002, however, the relationship between the Diocese and Joshua House could no longer continue, and Joshua House was on its own becoming a separate, secular organization. Since then, we have certainly struggled through some ups and downs. Through what has at times seemed nothing short of miraculous, many caring and talented people have

continued to join and support the efforts of Joshua House Fund, building 26 homes and involving 198 people in the trip itself.

We'll keep on going, knowing that the work we do has transformed the lives of many families in need in an area with few resources.

### Want to get involved?

Contact Eileen Ostberg or Anne Mullin.  
Email: [contact@joshuahousefund.org](mailto:contact@joshuahousefund.org)  
Or go to: [joshuahousefund.org](http://joshuahousefund.org)

1. Father Edward Howley
2. Valerie Gorman (past JHF Board Member), Diane McKeaver (past JHF President), and Nuns from the Good Shepherd Mission
3. Our own Barb Luby (current JHF President)
4. Petter (current JHF Board Member), Alex and Nicolai Ostberg
5. Deirdre Smith (current JHF Board Member) and Home Recipient, Doris Ridener
6. Rose Leitner and Dennis Shea, (past JHF Board Members)
7. The late Laura Riordan, shown center (past JHF Board Member)
8. Tim Percarpio, a volunteer with local children

## Experiencing Kentucky

Emma Webb



Emma Webb

“Despite setbacks, the community emphasizes neighborliness.”

Having never traveled further west in the United States than Washington D.C., I was excited to go to McCreary county and visit a part of the rural US that doesn't often get much attention. The landscape is covered by such a lush forest and breathtaking scenery it's hard to believe that so much of the community is wracked by poverty, unemployment, and drug problems. In our conversations with the locals, we learned that many of the jobs relied on the coal industry, and that field has become entrenched in family tradition. Tradition, combined with a lack of alternate job prospects, makes it difficult to earn a substantial income in McCreary county. Despite these setbacks, the community emphasizes neighborliness and strong familial connections, which we don't often see in the crowded suburbs of New England. For example, every day we ate lunch at a tiny church just up the road from the building site. Outside, a humble local graveyard showed an intricate network of family names that showed how

far back the lineages go. Almost every grave had a bouquet of plastic flowers on it, which, when everyone has so few financial resources, is a meaningful contribution. Highlighting this was something we noticed during reflection time; at the front of the church was a board detailing how many people had attended church that Sunday, and how much was donated to charity. Approximately 70 people had attended, but the total donation had come to \$4. Seeing that tiny amount was a grave reminder of how poor the area is and how important it is for the neighborhood to stick together and support each other.

One of the highlights of the trip was our discovery of a tiny pottery shop towards the end of the trip. It was a rainy day and we had bid farewell to the family and workers, and we decided to stop and check out this tiny store on the side of the road. Inside were dozens of intricately decorated plates, vases, and mugs that you never would have known existed were you just driving by. Almost every single one of us bought something as a souvenir, and it was great to be able to support a local small business.

## A New Perspective

Caroline Andren

Throughout my week in McCreary County, I learned a lot and gained a new perspective on life. Meeting so many wonderful people and working together as a team to help Hillary and Alan is something I will never forget.

When we first arrived, the builders were a little quiet and kind of shy, but as the days went by, and the house began to take shape, the builders became more comfortable with us and us with them. They told many stories and jokes on the building site and around the table during lunch.

Application Day made me feel appreciative for what I have, and for what JHF does for others who are less fortunate. Many local residents need any help they can get with their homes, even if it's just a



Caroline and Lynne Andren

porch or a new floor. Seeing the conditions that they live in makes you want to do all that you can to help. Another thing about the people of McCreary County that stood out to me was how happy and giving they were even though they may have had very little. The kids used nothing but their imagination to entertain themselves. No technology, just each other. For example, Hilary's son, Jaxon didn't want to watch TV, he just wanted to play made up

games and make a little “block man” out of scrap wood and nails.

On our final day, Hillary's grandma, called “Mamaw” invited everybody for breakfast. This made me realize that we had impacted their lives as much as they had impacted ours. Opening her home and cooking a delicious meal showed me how much she and her family appreciated Joshua House. By the end of the week, the two groups had bonded and the builders were laughing at us and making fun which made us feel like we had formed a real connection with them as friends. I realized how little one needs to be happy, a good group of friends, and a close and loving family like the Clark's. To be able to meet these wonderful people, and most of all, give the Clark's a new home for their family was such a rewarding experience.

“Building Houses, Changing Lives, It's what these people do..”

It is hard to say which moment stands out most from my week in Kentucky. Whether it was the discovery of boiled peanuts, Ma'maw's unique mug collection, deciphering anything and everything Curtis uttered, or dodging turtles on our ride to and from the build site, there were so many laughs and wonderful memories shared. Most remarkable to me, was witnessing how friendships were formed and relationships developed. As the house began to take shape, so too did our connection with the Clark's, the builders and their families. Our initial curt and cordial dialogue quickly turned into joke telling and teasing one another by day four. As we hammered alongside one another and dined on Diana's home cookin' we shared our interests, struggles and triumphs and a special bond was forged. Being collaborative is one thing, but working together with the sole purpose of helping others (like building a safe home for the Clark's) is truly amazing. I didn't realize how true JHF's mission statement, “Building houses changing lives...”, was until I experienced it all for myself. As I reflect back upon my time spent in Kentucky, I am not really sure who lives were changed more... mine or the Clark's. Thank you Joshua House for providing me with the opportunity to go beyond my comfort zone, meet new people, learn new skills and expand my understanding of the world around me all with my daughter, Caroline, by my side. I feel blessed to have experienced this journey with my daughter, to have met the people of McCreary county and all the volunteers of JHF. I will cherish the memories for a lifetime.

-- Lynne Andren

We would like to thank our contributors. With their generous support JHF can continue to build homes for families in need.

Donation Year - October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017

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