



Joshua House Fund
Building Houses -
Changing Lives

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JHF House Building Journal

Joshua House Fund
Building Houses - Changing Lives

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The 2015 Joshua House Fund building group assembled on the front porch of the new home. JHF participants include: William and Graham Foster, Lisa and Graham Webb, Debra and John Goll, Angus and Amy Foster, Tom and Anne Mullin, Dale O'Brien, Rose Leitner, Jane Renaud, Riley and Andrew Morrison, Barb Luby, Kevin Treesh, Bill Bates, Alex and Claudia Newton, Patrick and Kathleen Wolf, Jeb and Mary Rooney



Patrick & Kathleen Wolf at the build site

BUILT WITH LOVE BY PATRICK WOLF

The experiences I had in Kentucky with Joshua House were unforgettable. Everything from building the house to meeting the families and spending time with the locals was incredible. However, one of the most memorable parts of the trip was having the opportunity to interview a family who had been a previous recipient of a house. Not only did they just receive the house, they also renovated it, adding two more bedrooms and a second bathroom to the house. The house was beautiful and it was incredible seeing the finished product of what we were working so hard to build. The appreciation and humility that the family showed us was almost overwhelming. The thing that struck me the most was a sign that hung proudly in their kitchen saying, "This house was built with love". That's what Joshua House means to me. It's love for people that you have never met before and will likely

never see again. It's love that causes you to travel hundreds of miles just to help someone who needs it. The houses we built are more than just a place to live, it's a showing of love. It may sound cliché, but I gained a lot more than I gave on the trip.



THINGS I LEARNED IN KENTUCKY BY CLAUDIA NEWTON

1. A caravan of five minivans is way cooler and more fun than you think driving through the hills of Kentucky.
2. Rooming with your child for five days reveals much more than you'll ever know-and that's a good thing!
3. 6'3" 300 lb. men in overalls with power tools can be the most gentle, well-meaning men you've ever met.
4. Most of us have never used a hammer for more than hanging a picture...lots of hammers and we built a house!
5. The gratitude and love from the families and community touches your core.
6. The connection with these families is a true privilege and honor. We are the ones in the end who are so thankful.
7. Time spent with your child in service to others is different when you've stepped off of the hamster wheel.
8. We got so much more than we gave.
9. Who knew 10 boys could rock Taylor Swift on stage at Karaoke night!
10. Our reflection time after lunch focused on the simple pleasures of doing for others and wanting nothing more than being loved and a roof overhead. In the end we realized we are all the same.

Over 175 people have been on the Kentucky trip. When you see any of them, ask them what they think about the experience.

Jennifer Barahona
Corey, Pam & Bill Bates
Mary, Helene, Michael & Eric Collins
Harry, Margot, Dave, George & Caroline Congdon
Carolyn, Alicia, Tricia & Chris Conley
Claire, Katherine & Tracey Culliton
Michael, Danielle, Michael & Donna Correale
Kate, Sean, Elie, Mike, Thom, Greg & Pat Devlin
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Debra & John Goll
Valerie Gorman
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Kathryn & Debbie Lang
Christy, Maureen & Susan Lattimer
Hilary & Paul LeBlanc
Larry Langelo
Gary, Casey, Melanie & Kathy Larkins
Charlie, Maureen & Rose Leitner
Barb Luby
Stuart, Dillon & Trevor Maclean
Chris & Jake Martin
Bob McMahan
Deirdre, John & Andrew McAllister
Quentin, Allison & Riggs McDermott
Lizzy & Kim McGovern
Ann & Jimmy McKee
Mike & Diane McKeever
Francesca, Alexander & Martin Milewski
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Tom & Anne Mullin
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Jackie, Andrew, Eric, Victor & Deni Nesi
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Elizabeth Van Munching
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Lisa & Graham Webb
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Ellen, Peter & Maeve Zamsky

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STILL STRUGGLING IN KENTUCKY

BY JOHN GOLL

Preparing for the trip to Kentucky, we had all expected to see an economically disadvantaged area in need of housing; however, upon first arriving in the airport, it looked as if it were any other town. As we ventured deeper into the more rural areas full of natural beauty, a noticeable difference was seen. The area was visibly poorer; we commonly passed abandoned businesses, and trailers used as makeshift homes, often used to house many people.

Living in Connecticut surely has its advantages, many we often take for granted. For example, one of our Kentucky builders mentioned that many in the area have to brush their teeth with bottled water because of the acidity of the public water, treated and made safe by local water companies. This made us curious.

The weak economy in Kentucky is a result in large part of the reduction in the

coal industry, but what we don't see is what this industry has left behind: the contamination of the soil and groundwater. Hazardous chemicals remaining from coal extraction, whether from long ago or current production are stored in ponds or injected into abandoned mines, which can end up leaking into streams, rivers and groundwater. The Federal Government is funding remediation but it is a long and difficult process. The groundwater and air pollution combined with the weak economy left by many closed mines and plants has left Kentucky with one of the worst health rankings for its people in the country. In both cancer rates and rate of children in poverty, Kentucky ranks 50th out of our 50 states. In all, the people in Kentucky truly do need help, but many people don't know about the crisis there.

Most people assume living in America is comfortable if not luxurious, or at least



John Goll and Graham Webb getting ready to build.

safe from a health standpoint, but researching behind what we can see, Kentucky is anything but that for its people. While they are truly making great strides, it is not enough. It is important to give back and help in any way we can and I was glad to have the opportunity to do so with The Joshua House Fund. I enjoyed building the porch and raising the walls, but what was most moving to me was meeting the many applicants for next year's homes, and I was upset knowing that only one or two would be lucky enough to get a new place to live.

REFLECTIONS OF A GREAT TEAM EFFORT

BY AMY FRASER

As the saying goes, "It takes a village," and that is exactly what our family has experienced through the Joshua House Fund. Since my recent building trip with my son Gus, I often find myself reflecting on why I got involved, the very special group dynamic that is created working in Kentucky and why I want to remain part of JHF.

I remember walking one day with Margot Congdon on Long Neck Point surrounded by well-manicured lawns and big homes as she talked about JHF and the extreme, depressed conditions in Appalachia. I was struck by the contrast between what we have in Darien and what many don't have in that part of Kentucky. I leapt at the opportunity to get involved.

First, I joined the committee for the Phantom Ball -- my favorite fundraiser, no black tie party or live auction. Simply stay home and send in a donation to help build homes for families less fortunate in Kentucky. Realizing that the JHF volunteers (parents and teenagers) actually build the homes with the help of local contractors made the fundraising idea tangible and complete. A few of the contractors live in homes that JHF built for their families. They are so thankful and give back working on the new homes year after year. I was hooked and ready to get my hands dirty.



Amy & Gus Fraser bask in the glow of building two homes.

Gus and I were fortunate to travel to Kentucky this year to help build TWO homes! He has a passion for community service, carpentry and mechanical engineering and his enthusiasm to build was strong. McCreary County has beautiful rolling hills, winding roads and yes, tons of rundown trailers with rusted swing sets, old appliances and cars in the front lawns plus dogs roaming freely (no invisible fencing). Fellow volunteers were proud to point out homes JHF had built in the past that remain well kept and, in some cases, even have new additions. The screening process for families is thorough; JHF wants to



Joshua House Fund Inc

would like to thank supporters of the 2015 building project

With their support, we can continue to build houses in underserved areas of the United States.

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Matching Gifts Program

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ensure that the beneficiary families can manage the finances of their new home. The 2015 families have very different profiles: 1) young couple with a toddler; father works at night and mom works during day and 2) single, working father with four children, currently living in one-bedroom with grandparents.

Reflecting back to the building process brings a big smile to my face. Each day, the younger family would watch us build their home with excitement and wonder as their toddler waved at us in his little camouflage overalls. Local kids watched their dads build, curious to see who was visiting from far away (no daily summer camps or swim clubs to enjoy).

All of us quickly became friends, sharing hammers, nails, gloves, jokes and daily lunches, organized by the toddler's great grandmother, together in a nearby church.

After lunch, our group gathered to "reflect" on their experiences. I was so moved as teenagers and parents would describe deep feelings, some moved to tears, as the relationships between them and the local people grew closer. In McCreary County family is everything. Many have inherited family land, which is almost sacred and certainly a prized possession, and stay there even if it means traveling far for work. Keeping family close by, supporting others in need and the simple pleasure of a sturdy roof and decent home are the keys to happiness.

I feel so blessed to be a part of Joshua House Fund and am excited to learn who the new family or families are in 2016. I hope we can afford to build TWO homes again.

JHF and Barb Luby, the Board President, are dedicated to its mission and have developed wonderful, loyal connections with the local families and

Please join us for the

Annual Fall Barn Cocktail Party

featuring

Joshua House Information
Friday, November 13
7 PM—9PM

Please contact Lynne Andren for more information
(lynneandren@icloud.com)

builders in McCreary County. It is a well-oiled machine with a huge heart that has real impact. As I said, it takes a village...



DAILY JOURNAL

Day One

To be completely honest, I don't know what to expect tomorrow. I'm not sure what the family will be like or the other volunteers for that matter. But, it's exciting to imagine that I could change someone's life through a week's work. At home in Darien, CT, I am part of a volunteer organization named Post 53, which is an emergency medical service run primarily high school students and a handful of adult advisors. It is all about helping those in their darkest hour. And, while what we are doing here is not about acting quickly in life or death situations, I believe it will give hope and has the power to change the lives of people who have been living in terrible and unsafe conditions. I also think that that my time here will enlighten me to a different world and remove me from the protective walls of my life.

My parents have always told me "The world doesn't have what you have," but I never fully understood until seeing Somerset and Whitley, Kentucky. I know people who have anxiety about what coffee table to put in their living room, but to think that people have to worry about having their house taken away from them is terrifying. I have seen houses here that are literally falling apart. I don't know exactly what I can do to help, but I know I can do something. The world is huge, and I am eager to see what I can offer and this a perfect place to start.



Claudia Newton and son Alex are part of the wall raising team.

Day Two



Today was the first day on the job and it was difficult. It was my first time hammering nails and working outside for multiple hours in 95-degree heat. Doug, one of the builders from Kentucky who helps lead the project, told me today after I was having some trouble with hammering nails into a porch, "Before learning to walk, you have to learn to crawl." Simple but true. I was amazed that he was so patient and kind to a complete stranger. He never once rolled his eyes or acted irritated. It was heartening and encouraging to see him be so kind to me -- someone coming in from another part of the country with no experi-

ence. The community here is so tight-knit and compassionate. The family we are building for is very grateful and so kind. The Rideners are no different than you or me. All they want is to give their child a comfortable home so he gets a leg up to lead a successful life and send him into the world ready for all the challenges along the way. They have the same fears and hopes for their 9 month-old son that any parent would have. Now their future is brighter than it has ever been before. "Before learning to walk, you have to learn to crawl."

Day Three

What do you think when you hear the word "city?" New York? Boston? Philadelphia? Well the people of McCreary County think Somerset, Kentucky, a town filled with one-story buildings and fast food restaurants. For those reading this from the East Coast it seems crazy to imagine Somerset is their "city." But, truly, it's not. We are simply blessed with the luck of the draw. If a native of Kentucky saw one of the big Northeast cities, it would be mind-blowing. People here long mostly to be able to provide their families with the necessities of life. Those that have told me that their houses are falling apart still have the some of the biggest grins I have ever seen in my life. They are different than us -- in a good way, though. They are not different in a strange way, but a unique way. These people, these amazing people, make something out of almost nothing. They lead simple lives with wholesome values. It made me wonder if those of us from up North may have lost some of that along way.

Day Four

Today was application day, the day that folks from around the county come to apply to be the recipients of next year's Joshua House Fund build. I was so saddened to know that out of the 30 to 40 people that came, only one will get

their piece of the American Dream through JHF. The case that stuck out to me was the man with three young children and an epileptic wife. The husband is not allowed to work because he has nerve damage to the point of losing feeling in his legs from an ATV accident. I already knew that this family had a very small chance of being selected (like all the applicants) and I think he was aware of that as well. Despite this, his children were laughing, playing and teasing their dad. At that moment, I realized the families applying weren't unhappy, but rather hopeful that they would have a house built for them. They respect and admire us so much, even though they might not get what it feels like they so deserve.

Day Five

I interviewed one of the recipients of a house from a Joshua House Fund build from 2012 and she was so happy that her daughter had a home. Her name was Andrea and her daughter is Sundae Grace. Andrea was thrilled and couldn't stop talking about how dramatically her child's life had improved since the gift of a house. She told me everyone needs their own nook or cranny on the Earth to just be themselves and have a good time. That's why Joshua House is so great. This organization gives those without a place to call home somewhere to live a happy and normal life. We take it for granted maybe because we don't have to think about it in those terms. We all want that piece of that American Dream. However, some get more than others, but it doesn't matter how much you get. If you get even the smallest sliver you still have an idea of how important a home is to a family and how important your family is to you. Andrea told me that the relationships in their family, especially between her and Sundae Grace, have improved a great deal now that they have a clean, safe place to call home -- their own piece of the Dream.

Day Six



Today was a bittersweet day. On one hand I get to go back to home to see friends and family, but on the other, I'll probably never get to feel as though I made such an impact on a family's life again. This amazing trip went so quickly even though working in the intense sun and heat felt like an eternity some days. At the start of the trip, all I thought was, "Wow, this will look amazing on my resume," but I got so much more than I gave. I learned from the families that any negative situation can be looked back on and give you a few good laughs. I also learned that life is not to be taken for granted and materialistic things can only give you a quick burst of joy. Is it worth it though? One woman in particular named Wanda said she wanted to go to Tokyo, but when she learned of the hectic life style there thought it would be too much to handle. They don't want more

because sometimes the simplest things are the most satisfying. Another man said his bucket list was just to hunt and fish with his family.

What's on your bucket list? You are probably thinking that nothing that simple could complete a life, but it makes me realize that often the greatest pleasure comes from simple moments and time with family and friends, not from things. The woman at the Red Roof Inn counter named Elaine said she was excited to take her kids to the dentist. For you and me that's probably a nuisance.

Imagine a world where you live with your family and friends without the hectic lifestyle or constant envy or desire. That's Kentucky.

Alex Newton

