

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY



I WENT TO NEW YORK CITY TO MAKE A SPEECH AND WHILE I WAS THERE, I WAS ASKED BY MILLARD FULLER, THE HEAD OF HABITAT, TO GO BY THE WORK SITE AND WHEN I GOT THERE, I SAW A TERRIBLE SIX STORY BUILDING. IT WAS FILLED WITH DEBRIS.

EVENTUALLY, WE GOT 42 PEOPLE THAT WENT UP ON A TRAILWAYS BUS AND HAD ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES OF OUR LIFE. I'M NOT SURE THE WORLD WOULD HAVE FOUND OUT ABOUT HABITAT IF PRESIDENT AND MRS. CARTER IN 1984 HADN'T GOTTEN ON THAT BUS AND TAKEN A GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS UP TO NEW YORK TO DO THAT FIRST BIG REHAB PROJECT. I NEVER DREAMED, AT THAT POINT, THAT IT WOULD MIGHT BECOME AN ANNUAL AFFAIR THAT HAS ENRICHED OUR LIVES IN MANY WAYS.

I REALLY CAN'T MAKE SPEECHES AT HABITAT BECAUSE I GET SO CHOKED UP AND I LOOK AND SEE THE HOMEOWNERS AND I SEE, OH, THE WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERS WHO ARE JUST WORKING TO DO SOMETHING GOOD FOR SOMEBODY WHO NEEDS HELP, SO I THANK YOU.

EVERY TIME THAT I AM AT A CARTER BUILD, I FEEL LIKE IT CHANGES MY LIFE EVERY TIME BECAUSE YOU JUST GOTTA SEE IT FOR YOURSELF AND ALL YOU GOT TO DO IS GO ONE TIME AND YOU'RE IN, YOU'RE HOOKED. IT'S A WONDERFUL. I CAN TELL YOU THE EXPERIENCE. IT'S LIKE YOU HAVE TO BE HERE TO KNOW IT, EXCELLENT. JUST LIKE SUGAR FALLING OUT OF THE SKY, IT'S GOING SO BEAUTIFUL. AT SOME POINT YOU HAVE TO STOP AND JUST LISTEN AND THE HAMMERING OF THESE HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF HAMMERS, WHEN YOU KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING, IS THEY'RE BUILDING LOVE AND IT'S, IT'S THE GREATEST FEELING ON THE PLANET. THERE'S NO WAY TO DESCRIBE THE EFFECT THAT HAVING A HOUSE HAS ON A FAMILY. IT ADDS SO MUCH TO THEIR SELF-ESTEEM.

IN '95, I WAS ASKED TO SPEAK TO EVERYBODY AND AS I'M TALKING I COULDN'T HELP BUT REMEMBERING WHERE WE WERE COMING FROM AND WHERE WE WERE GOING, I JUST STARTED CRYING, I WAS DONE, I COULDN'T CONTINUE AND AS I WAS WALKING DOWN, PRESIDENT CARTER COMES UP AND HE HUGS ME AND HE SAID IT'S PEOPLE LIKE YOU THAT MAKE US PROUD OF WHAT WE DO.

JUST THINK ABOUT A 15-YEAR-OLD KID HEARING A FORMER PRESIDENT SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT. I BELIEVE THAT EMPOWERED ME AND MADE ME WHO I AM.

I THINK IT'S A HUMAN RIGHT FOR ANYBODY TO NOT HAVE TO STRUGGLE FOR THE BIT, THEIR BASIC NEEDS AND REALLY, THIS APARTMENT IS SUCH A PRIVILEGE, TO BE ABLE TO NOT HAVE TO MAKE TONS OF MONEY JUST SO THAT YOU CAN HAVE A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD. MY KIDS AND I, WE HAVE GROWN A LOT CLOSER. WE'VE GROWN TOGETHER IN HIS HOUSE AND THERE'S A LOT OF LOVE IN HIS HOUSE AND IT WAS TRULY A GREAT BLESSING FOR MYSELF AND MY GIRLS, A GREAT BLESSING.

MANY TIMES AT THE END OF THE WEEK WHEN THE HOUSE WAS FINISHED AND WE DELIVERED A