

A Continuing Legacy:

From Women's Rights to Women Build

BY DIANE DAVIS

Women who never imagined they could wield a hammer nevertheless brought positive attitudes to help women of Flower City Habitat for Humanity construct their fifth house. Stay-at-home moms got baby-sitters; working professionals donated vacation days. Organizations rallied their members; and women of prominence used their brains and brawn for a unique project in Rochester, N.Y.

The site for the build was the former neighborhood of women's rights activist Susan B. Anthony. In fact, Anthony's sister taught at a school that stood on the building site until 1946. The construction commemorated the 150th anniversary of Anthony's involvement in the women's rights movement of the late 1800s. The house was the first new construction in the Susan B. Anthony neighborhood in 100 years!

Houses built in this once thriving middle- and working-class 19th-century neighborhood border a Frederick Law Olmsted-designed urban park and typify an eclectic mix of architectural styles ranging from Greek Revival to Board & Batten. Although some restoration efforts have been made, there were vacant lots and boarded up or deteriorating dwellings.... Just the sort of place Flower City earmarks for revitalization.

While the neighborhood association was thrilled about the project, the city's Preservation Board turned down Habitat's first design. Later, a modified porch and exterior trim details satisfied the board's requirements.

Building in a preservation district means higher costs. The use of fiber-cement clapboard siding, Miratec exterior trim boards, yellow pine tongue-and-groove porch decking, beadboard porch ceilings, cedar fascia boards, fir plywood soffits and clear cedar balustrade components all contributed to the higher price tag. However, the increased cost was not passed onto the homeowner; the cost wasn't so much more that there was a need to increase the \$425 monthly mortgage payment.

Professional women and retirees composed the build's steering committee. Volunteers solicited in-kind donations (some from women-owned building supply firms), conducted fund-raisers, and provided publicity and outreach to women's groups, organizations, businesses and celebrities. The entire community was invited to buy "Square Foot Certificates" for \$50 apiece. A local advertising agency contributed creative poster designs to attract volunteers and donations.



COURTESY OF FLOWER CITY HFH



ALLISON BOURNE

Susan B. Anthony's sister taught at a school that stood on the building site until 1946.

A wide variety of groups and individuals was recruited to work on the house. One Saturday, Ursula Burns, president of Xerox Corporation Document Systems and Solutions Group, led a team of eight senior women who traded their laptops for hammers to work on drywall finishing and painting. Libby Pataki, wife of New York's Governor George Pataki, also paid a visit to the house and added some finishing touches to the project.

All of this was accomplished because the women of Flower City HFH were determined to continue the powerful legacy begun more than a hundred years ago by a woman

in that very neighborhood, recognizing her legacy as a pathway to the opportunities women have available to them now—even building houses!

Diane Davis is resource manager for Flower City HFH in Rochester, N.Y.

Editor's note: Flower City Habitat for Humanity was founded in 1984 and has built or rehabilitated 125 homes. The affiliate is one of the largest in the northeast and utilizes 3,500–4,000 volunteers annually. For more information, visit www.rochesterhabitat.org.

inside

'What Do You Do?'	2
Our First Women Build	3
Homeownership Is Just the Beginning	4
The Journey of Julia's Poem	5
An Exciting New Partnership!	5
'Living Beyond Your Lifetime'	6
Women Build Goes Global	7
'Women of Steel' Build in Hungary	8

‘What Do You Do?’

BY CATHY BELATTI

I recently met with friends to catch up on our lives. We shared about our families and travels. Eventually, we began to talk about our work and I was asked, “What are you doing these days?”

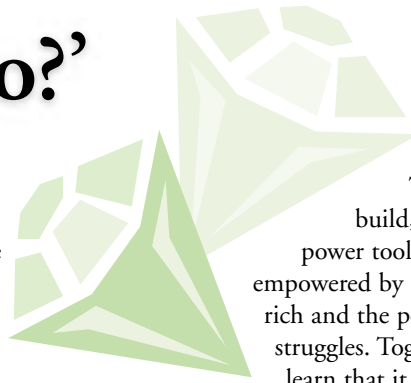
I was excited to delve into my narrative about Women Build, careful to include a detailed description of the Women Building A Legacy program. Everyone listened intently. I was pleased that I had successfully spread the word. What I did not anticipate was how the conversation would haunt me for days. After considerable reflection, I found I was not so much troubled by what information I had shared in that opportune moment, but by what I had not shared.

“What do you do?” is sometimes difficult to explain. My friend, a school principal, was once asked that same question and decided to record her every move of just one school day—10 pages on legal paper! I remember thinking that her record keeping, while adequately detailing her daily actions, could never communicate all that happened in the course of her day. How could she effectively write down her personal interactions with the students, parents and teachers? Perhaps, then, it is not so much the things we do that are worth recording, but the *effect* of the things we do that is worth noting.

I would have no trouble recording the things I do for Women Build, but I find it difficult to write about the *essence* of Women Build. Have you ever tried writing about the essence of faith or love? Words are simply deficient.

I will, nevertheless, share with you the vocabulary I feel best describes the fundamental nature of Women Build, the pieces which tell the veritable story. To uncover the real meaning of what we do, one must look to the faces of the Habitat children. It is in their smiles that you read the story of their dreams. Look closely into the eyes of Habitat mothers—there you will see the words of comfort, love and devotion. No legal pad, no pen, can capture their story.

Like a fine diamond, the essence of Women Build is multifaceted. Volunteers are as much a part of the gem as homeowners.



They come in droves, eager to build, heaving up roof trusses, using power tools, installing windows, becoming empowered by their newly discovered abilities. The rich and the poor among them share the same struggles. Together they find solutions. They learn that it is not about doing or not doing; it is about loving and serving one another.

The Women Build Steering Council, a forum of women who lead with their wisdom, experience and dedication, is another facet of the Women Build jewel. They travel the country creating strategies to increase the number of Habitat houses. They plumb their resources for ways to overcome formidable obstacles. They share their belief that God is providing the vision and the pathway to success. Council women don work boots as easily as dress shoes, working with volunteers to turn the vision into reality. They create happy endings.

The next time someone asks, “What do you do?” I will say this: Habitat for Humanity Women Build brings women, homeowners, volunteers and steering council members together to build the Kingdom of God on earth. We do this through faith and belief in a mission that if every person does one good thing, the world will be a better place. That is what we do....

That is what I do.

Cathy Belatti is a founding member and chair of the Women Build Steering Council.

Devoted...

Editor's note: Several people have asked if we have any Women Build devotions for sharing on build sites. We have been blessed with a series of devotions compiled by Pat Day, and we will share one or two of these in each upcoming issue of Women Build News.

Gems & Jewels

“You’re a gem!”

“What a jewel!”

Many times we hear these phrases of appreciation. Someone doing a good deed is a “gem” or a “jewel.” As I look around this site today, I see many gems and jewels. Sure, they’re hidden behind jeans, shirts and work boots, with hair held back in rubber bands and with no make-up.... But the plain coverings hide a gem of great value: a woman willing to take risks; a woman willing to take a different path; a woman willing to learn new skills; a woman willing to share what she has with others; a woman willing to give of herself for no gain but the satisfaction of doing her best.



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Editor: Judy Crabill

Contributing Writers:

Cathy Belatti, Judy Crabill, Diane Davis, Pat Day, Julia K. Dinsmore, Fiona Eastwood, Erin Gasch, Milana McLead, Alison Paradise

Editorial Assistance: Leigh Powell, Matthew Insley

Graphic Designer: Cynthia Friesen

Habitat for Humanity International, 121 Habitat St., Americus, GA 31709-3498, USA. phone: (229) 924-6935. fax: (229) 928-1242. www.habitat.org/wb/





For the Record:

Our First Women Build

BY ALISON PARADISE

Could it be done? Our first Women Build began with uncertainty—but grew with excitement. Though there were days when we got behind schedule, in the end, we finished early! And Cynthia and her two children now have a safe, decent and affordable place to live. Surely we will always remember these highlights of the project:

A carpentry class from the local women's prison made the forms for the foundation and helped with pouring it. Many of these women promised that when they are released they will come to see the finished house.

On the first day of the build, more women than scheduled came to the site. Everyone found a job, and by noon we had raised the first wall—live on TV. All of the walls were up before the day ended.

The next day we set two affiliate records: fastest truss-setting time, and fastest sheathing and nailing time. During the following

days, more and more women came back, scheduled or not, eager to learn and practice new skills. Someone suggested carving notches on a piece of wood to represent each new skill—proof of their work!

On the seventh day, the governor of Washington came by to watch the work.

Then came the repetitious mudding, taping and sanding.... And,

...More and more women came back, scheduled or not, eager to learn and practice new skills.

finally, a welcome change to painting; Cynthia, our new homeowner, chose some very bright colors! The house was taking shape!

Groups of career women came to help us. They told us that they were taking something back to their offices—the joy of teamwork and relationships.

On the 17th day of the build we set another affiliate record with our speed insulating the crawlspace under the house.

Then it was time to deal with “The Rock.” It was huge. It was



COURTESY OF TACOMA/PIERCE COUNTY HFH

on site from the beginning. We kept moving it around; we tripped over it; but finally, we decided to get it out of the way. Cynthia wanted the rock in her front yard. It took seven women (and some creativity) to move it 50 feet to the chosen spot. But Cynthia told us that the rock represented her: It had been moved around a lot, yet remained solid. Now, like Cynthia, it is there to stay.

The last week was filled with trimming and touch-ups, minutia and details—just the way women want to finish things! Eagerly, we prepared for celebration and dedication. More than 100 people came. Cynthia will no longer worry about affording a decent place to live; she and her children are assured of a good home.

As for us, the women builders, we could not have had a better experience. We believe we will never have a problem recruiting women to volunteer. In a relaxed atmosphere, women of all ages and backgrounds worked together for 19 days, learning that it could be done. It did not matter that some were more skilled than others. We had a common goal, supporting each other as we achieved it.

Nineteen days...150 women... The proof is in the house—it was done!

Alison Paradise is the public relations and fund-raising chair of Tacoma/Pierce County HFH in Washington.

To create a beautiful gem, it must be polished by tumbling in a drum against the rough surfaces of other stones. Today's woman throws her life into the polishing drum, rubs against rough surfaces and comes out polished to a high gloss from the abrasiveness of daily living.

We thank you, our God, for each woman here who comes to share her gifts, take the risks and work together that a family may have a greater opportunity for a good life. May you be so overwhelmed by the inner beauty of each gem that you will bless us and protect us as we work together.

Pat Day is a volunteer with Greater Fox Cities Area HFH in Wisconsin.



passing on the dream

BY ERIN GASCH

'Before I got my house, I would quit when things got hard.... After getting the house, I realized... there had to be a way.'

Homeownership Is Just the Beginning

"I thought that once I owned my own house I'd be perfectly content, that I'd have achieved something," says Habitat homeowner Dani Day of Denver, Colo. "But once I got settled in my home, I realized that there was a lot more I wanted to do."

Day's experience illustrates how becoming a Habitat homeowner usually leads families to keep achieving, continuing to make their lives better.

Day was accepted into the Habitat for Humanity program in 1993 and quickly started putting in the required 500 "sweat-equity" hours for her house, the first Women Build house for the Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver affiliate. After that, Day contributed 1,000 more hours.

"I know my house inside and out," Day says. "I love that I know all the little details! Before I got my house, I would quit when things got hard. I wanted to continue my education, but thought I'd never have the money. After getting the house, I realized that I could afford to go to school; there had to be a way."

She began taking college courses. Her new Habitat friends provided the support she needed. "They made me realize that there were resources out there for me," Day explains.

Now Day is concentrating on big dreams for her children—Adam, Samantha and James. All three have watched other Habitat homeowner children in the neighborhood go off to college. The children have developed strong friendships resulting from their safe neighborhood. Most of the families in the subsidized apartment complex where they previously lived were transient; Day knows there could have been no lasting relationships there.

It is the friendships and the skills Day gained from Habitat experiences that have made her passionate about continuing to give back to the community. She enjoys her full-time job as director of equipment and supplies for the KUSA Channel 9 Health Fair, a community program of many volunteers.

As it has for so many families, Habitat for Humanity has done more than just provide Day and her family with a place to live; Habitat for Humanity has inspired them to keep dreaming and achieve their goals. Day's story demonstrates how Habitat for Humanity builds families as well as houses.

Homeownership is just the beginning!

Erin Gasch is the former co-chair of HFH of Metro Denver's Women Build public relations committee. Dani Day has recently become a member of the Women Build Steering Council.

'Women of Steel' Go to New Zealand

On Sept. 12, a team of women will depart the United States for a two-week building excursion with a Habitat for Humanity affiliate in New Zealand...and you're invited to join the team!

You will be building in Manukau—a suburb of Auckland, the nation's largest city. Situated on an isthmus, the "City of Sails" is home to some of the world's loveliest beaches. You'll have an opportunity to work alongside the family receiving the home, while still having time to take advantage of the beautiful attractions of this island nation.

For more information about how you can apply, contact Milana McLead, preferably by e-mail, at mmclead@hfhi.org. If you do not have ready access to e-mail, you may contact her by phone at (229) 924-6935, ext. 2266.



The Journey of Julia's Poem

BY JULIA K. DINSMORE

Birthing in 1992 from the aching heart of an illiterate welfare mother, "My Name Is Not Those People" has been on an amazing journey to many places and peoples around the world. It has been the subject of Bible studies and several graduate degree theses. It is used in social studies courses in secondary schools and in college and university courses around the United States. The late Senator Paul Wellstone read the poem on the floor of the U.S. Senate during the welfare reform debate; I was given a gold-embossed copy of the congressional record where it appeared.

Church, community and organization newsletters have published the poem. Social service community workshops and conferences have been named after the poem. I mentored a college student through university and law school who translated the "street knowledge" I taught him into "legal language" and wrote an award-winning legal defense against the welfare laws contained in the poem.

A few years ago, my son asked me, "Mom, if your poem is so famous, why are we still on food stamps and can't afford to get a decent car?" It was then I decided to design a wall hanging of the poem. Last year Stanford University offered \$50 each if I autographed and dated them. I was told that they would become collector's items.

I often hear stories about how the poem is being used in various ways throughout the United States and abroad. For example, a group of aboriginal Australians from the World Indigenous Peoples Network visited the Fond Du Lac Indian Reservation last year and took a copy of my wall-hanging poem home to Australia.

We are still poor enough to qualify for food stamps and still do not have a reliable car, but I have collected these stories and decided to use them to fill a chapter in the book I am writing about my terrible-beautiful life. Appropriately, the title of my book is *My Name Is Not Those People*.

I am proud that wherever the poem has traveled it has become cherished in the hearts and minds of people, especially those who have suffered the weight of social and economic degradation.

May the journey continue!

Julia Dinsmore is a Habitat homeowner in Duluth, Minn.

Editor's note: See the Spring 2003 issue of Women Build News for Julia Dinsmore's poem, "My Name Is Not Those People."



COURTESY OF HOME INTERIORS AND GIFTS INC.

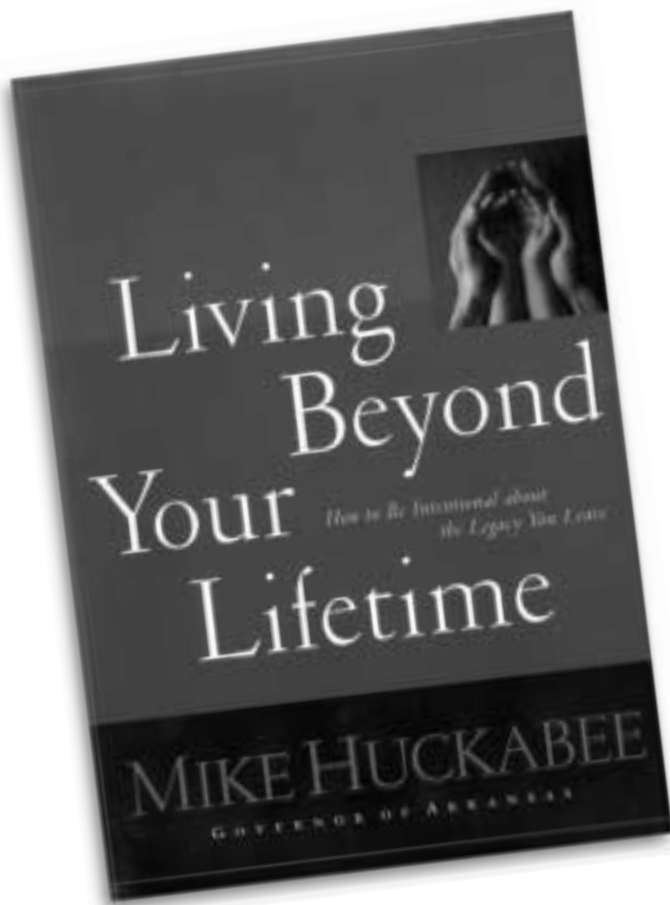
Home Interiors and Gifts: An Exciting New Partnership!

We are delighted to announce a three-year partnership with Home Interiors and Gifts Inc. Based in Dallas, Texas, this company is one of the nation's largest direct sellers of decorative accessories and gifts in the world. Founded by Mary Crowley in 1957, and based upon her strong entrepreneurial spirit, belief in the individual and vision for a better way of life, the company has experienced phenomenal success and is firmly established as an influential leader in today's home decor industry. The company has more than 70,000 independent contractors in the United States, Puerto Rico, Canada and Mexico. Home Interiors will offer an exclusive, limited edition "Habitat for Humanity—Building Homes & Decorating Lives" candle and complementary ceramic shade during June and July 2003, with a portion of the sales from these items designated to funding Women Build houses to be built in 2004.

To find out more about this tremendous partner, please visit their Web site at www.homeinteriors.com.



Governor Mike Huckabee's *'Living Beyond Your Lifetime'*



BY JUDY CRABILL

As Habitat women continue the Women Build A Legacy program, they will discover a deeper understanding of legacy by reading *Living Beyond Your Lifetime* by Mike Huckabee, governor of Arkansas.

Governor Huckabee defines legacy as “living beyond one’s lifetime.” How can that be? He tells us that the legacy that lives beyond our years is not about possessions or money. It is, rather, about character, personality, values, integrity and relationships. Moreover, legacy doesn’t just happen.

We are building our legacy every day of our lives. While we may think little about this, we surely will leave footprints. Whatever they are, that’s how we live beyond our lifetime.

Is the legacy we are building a good example for our children and friends? Will others view leadership as our legacy? Will generosity, courage and integrity live again through those who knew us?

Discussing the difference between immediate and ultimate good, Governor Huckabee says, “I remind myself that the most important decisions are not what affects the next election, but what affects the next generation. Because we live in an era of instant gratification, we go against the times when we choose to live to impact lives now and after we are gone.”

What will we leave behind? What can we send ahead? At John D. Rockefeller’s funeral, someone asked Rockefeller’s accountant, “How much did he leave behind?”

The accountant replied, “All of it; he didn’t take a thing with him.”

When we consider how temporary our possessions are, building our legacy becomes more important. The oft-quoted scripture Matthew 6:19-20 admonishes us to forget laying up treasures on earth, but to build them up in heaven through obedience to Christ’s clear command to serve others. Thus, we create our footprints.

Governor Huckabee reminds us: “Life is not a dress rehearsal. There is but one performance. How we live will influence people we do not know and people who may not even be alive today. Will someone follow our footsteps? Where will our footsteps take them?”

Seeds we plant now through Habitat for Humanity and Women Build will bear fruit in the lives of those who follow our footsteps. What kind of fruit? We are determining that as we build.

As Habitat women, we will surely live beyond our lifetime through the houses we build with lumber and nails—but also through the character we exhibit as we work. The houses are the tangible evidence of our character and our intentions. And will we not also live in the hearts of the families who are nurtured by the houses we build? Those who watched us work, those who know the Habitat story—are they not a part of our legacy?

Individually and collectively, Habitat women are building a legacy as we demonstrate our agreement with Jesus that to serve others is the primary purpose in life. That’s our legacy.

Judy Crabill is a member of the Women Build Steering Council and editor of Women Build News.



Women Build Goes Global



Participants in a Women Build event in Tanzania greet a fellow builder.

BY FIONA EASTWOOD

Women Build, which has been by and large focused in the United States, is now going global.

That's not to say that there hasn't been any Women Build activity in other countries in the past. In fact, there have been Women Build houses constructed in a variety of countries—including some that surprised us with their interest in Women Build, as we had thought women building houses in those places would have been culturally unacceptable.

In 1999, two houses were built in the Philippines as part of the Jimmy Carter Work Project, and women built five houses in Uganda. Women also built a house in Tanzania, with the participation of the first ladies of Tanzania and Zanzibar. In March 2000, a Global Village team of women from the United States joined women in Northern Ireland and worked together on two houses with families there.

The "Women of Steel"—another Global Village team—ventured into Braga, Portugal, almost three years ago. Women actually working on a construction site sparked a flurry of media attention, resulting in a four-page story in the Portuguese equivalent of *Newsweek* magazine, among other publications. The team of women, ranging in age from 17 to 74, earned their name by working on the steel frames of the Portuguese Habitat houses. The wives of the homeowners there had not done more than prepare meals while the men worked on site.... Until the "Women of Steel" appeared! Inspired, the Portuguese Habitat homeowners—men and women alike—now work together on the construction of their houses.

Another Global Village team of women headed south—way south to New Zealand—and constructed the first-ever Women Build house there in 2000. The men prepared the lunches, looked after children and even—yes—made curtains! Two more Women Build houses are getting under way this year in Auckland and Dunedin. (See the "Women of Steel" announcement on Page 4.)

In 2001, two Women Build houses were built as part of the Jimmy Carter Work Project in South Korea, and 10 were constructed during the 2002 Jimmy Carter Work Project in Durban, South Africa. In addition to these builds, local women crews built the first-ever Women Build houses in Australia and the Fiji Islands.

For Fiji, this Women Build was a breakthrough on two

counts: First, women from two different cultures, Fijian and Indian, worked side by side despite the strong differences these two groups have had; and secondly, in a strongly patriarchal society where women do not traditionally build homes, these women demonstrated their ability to bring unity while providing two houses for families in need.

In October of this year, five Women Build houses will be constructed as a part of the 20-house Kenneth Kaunda Work Project in Lusaka, Zambia. Kenneth Kaunda was the president of Zambia for 27 years and is often referred to as the "Father of Zambia."

In Canada, three Women Build houses have been constructed within the past two years, and Canada's national office is now working to establish a nationwide Women Build program.

The Women Build Steering Council—a council that acts in an advisory capacity to the Women Build department—has established a "Global Expansion Committee" for the purpose of developing and growing Women Build programs in various countries around the world. The committee is made up of dynamic women from across the globe, with representation in Latin America, Canada, Europe, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. This committee will develop a strategic plan for expansion—no small task given the complexity of cultures, religions and laws that can exist within even one country. In keeping with Habitat's grass-roots philosophy, we will be looking to teams of local women to lead and guide the process in communities around the world.

Women Build is about creating opportunities for women to work together in a supportive environment, teaching them how to build simple, decent houses with families in need. In every country, despite broad differences in many areas, one fact remains constant: It is of utmost importance to women that they have a place in which they can safely raise their children. Women homeowners and volunteers alike can learn skills they will be able to put to use for many years to come, while working toward eliminating poverty housing worldwide.

Fiona Eastwood is the director of Habitat for Humanity International's Women Build program.



'Women of Steel' Build in Hungary

BY MILANA MCLEAD

“We are happy to know that across the ocean you heard we needed help,” said Elizabeth Szabo, director of Habitat for Humanity Dunavarsány in Hungary. “We are happy you came to Dunavarsány, and we will never forget you. Thank you for your humanity and your friendship.”

Her words summed up two weeks of hard work, sweat, tears, laughter and friendship for a Global Village Women Build work team known as the “Women of Steel.” The WOS got their name in 2000 when they traveled to Portugal and did steel-stud framing in the northern city of Braga.

In 2001, the team elected to go to Hungary, specifically so they could work under the leadership of Agi Koroknai, Habitat’s only full-time female construction supervisor outside the United States. The 10-member group sought and found a thoroughly cross-community experience, and enthusiastically overcame the cultural and language differences they encountered.

A local women’s club welcomed the team with open arms. “We greet you with lots of love in the nicest place in Hungary,” said club president “Queenie,” through a translator at a club-sponsored cookout.

“Thank you for coming to make a stronger Habitat for people in need in Dunavarsány.” The Women Build temporary tattoos the group shared broke down any reticence in getting to know one another; by evening’s end, the groups were singing national anthems together from around the world.

As cultural barriers came tumbling down, some of the local club members decided to join the WOS at the work site. “The Women’s Club came out here because you are here,” says Koroknai. “These ladies got something out of your Women Build team being here. Otherwise

they wouldn’t have come.”

The WOS made an impression on some of the homeowner women as well. “It was unusual to see women on the work site,” said soon-to-be Habitat homeowner Julianna Major. “In Hungary, this is not a usual thing.” But soon, homeowners like Major were working side by side with the WOS team as they framed interior walls and installed insulation and windows.

For the WOS team members, the chance to work on an all-women team was a plus for their Global Village experience. “Men tend to take over on a work site,” said 45-year-old Beth Miakinin, an automotive engineer from Detroit. “It’s cool to work with women doing something they haven’t done before, without men coming to ‘rescue’ us.... There isn’t a feeling of hierarchy among us. If men are around, we get relegated to fixing lunch.”

Other team members agreed. “The camaraderie is different with just women,” said 70-year-old Tina Karsian.

“Women in general have more open attitudes toward new experiences than guys,” said Holly Grubb, a 41-year-old computer consultant. “If this team had been mixed, we never would have gone to the ballet.” She laughed, recalling the team’s last-minute decision to drop everything and head to Budapest for the Royal Opera Hall’s final performance of the season.

In the end, the WOS—ranging in age from 35 to 70, and working in professions ranging from law to publishing—succeeded in breaking down barriers. We learned that even though we are separated by geography, what we have in common is far greater than our differences. We encouraged and embraced our WOS sisters, and found that together, we could accomplish anything.

Milana McLead is the editor of Habitat World magazine.

Editor’s note: Find out about the next building adventure planned by the “Women of Steel”—details on Page 4!

‘The camaraderie is different with just women.’



MILANA MCLEAD

