

# TURNING POINTS

## Habitat Means Hope To My Family

by Kathy May Tran

While many people have heard about Habitat for Humanity, most do not realize the deep impact it has on the people it serves. Millard Fuller founded Habitat on a fundamental principle of his Christian belief: Jesus' love is a simple demonstration of kindness. Based in Americus, Georgia and publicized by Jimmy Carter, Habitat demonstrates love by building affordable homes for needy families all over the world. It is fueled by donations and volunteers who contribute their time, skills, and resources. Most importantly, Habitat spreads the Christian word—spiritual support to accompany physical provisions. It changes lives; it changed my life. In our moment of desperation, Habitat came to the rescue.

My family endured a difficult life. My parents divorced while my brother, Tom, and I were very young children. Our worries grew as our single-parent household plummeted into the depths of poverty. My mother, Hue, struggled to provide for our little family. Though she barely spoke English, she learned as she taught us. For years, she worked as a waitress and attended school, both full-time. Even though she toiled endlessly, our finances were unstable. We were dependent on government aid and could only afford to live in a small, one-bedroom apartment in a neighborhood that was the scene of drug dealing, gang activity, and seemingly inescapable misery. My mother was always sorry we had to live there, but she tried her best to protect us and make our lives decent. She never diminished in strength. She was determined not to be another link in the cycle of poverty.

Tom and I learned the ways of the world by following her admirable example. We had far less than any of the other children—fewer toys, no television, and second-hand clothes. Our mother raised us well; however,

and we were happy children.

Our family was the target of a crime years later. A man hid in our closet and attacked my mother. With his knife he stripped her clothes and prepared to rape her, but she reasoned with him in the unnerving situation. She talked to him, told him about her children, her dreams, and God's love for him, no matter what he did or what he was about to do. She asked him to spare her. He did.

It was really God who spared our mother that day. He had a plan for us and introduced saving grace in the form of Habitat for Humanity. We were sure we could never afford to own a house; however, Habitat assured us they could help us escape the troubles, fear, and danger of our present life. Habitat would build us a home, and God would provide, regardless our financial situation.

Our entire family was amazed that there were such good people in the world who gave so much to help absolute strangers. Tom and I met lifelong friends, mentors, and role models we will never forget. Habitat opened a world of Christian love to us. I witnessed God's miracles occur-



ring before my very eyes. His followers are beautiful and gracious; His generosity and mercy are vast. The volunteers contributed because they truly knew the happiness that God offers and wanted to share it with others.

Habitat presented us our very own home in 2001 on one of the most joyous days of our lives. The generous volunteers and the wonderful organization gave us a gift that many people are never fortunate enough to receive, but the gift was not just a house. The gift was opportunity; the gift was friendship; the gift was love.

Our lives are now models of the American dream. From a divorced immigrant with two young children, we have become more than anyone ever expected. Tom excels in school and prepares to begin his first year at Mercer's pharmacy school. I am a sophomore on the pre-medical track at Yale University. My mother, especially, has felt the blessing of God. Many people never even dare to dream of achieving the goals that she has accomplished. She is now a registered nurse in the ICU and is earning her realtor's license. Tom and I can never fully express our

pride, respect, or love for her. We cherish her for sacrificing everything for our sake. We thank the Lord for sending such a generous and humble woman to guide us.

On the worksite of Habitat, I have witnessed lives changing. I have seen satisfied faces of workers after a hard day's work, I have joined homeowners overcome with emotion, and I have heard endless praises to the Lord. The world is not perfect, but Habitat makes it a far better place. It is relief in a world that too often seems unavoidably bleak.

The goal of Habitat, our chapter's president once told me, is to eliminate poverty and provide a glimmer of hope to those in desperate need. No matter the adversities of life, there is hope because there is God. Perhaps for many people, God will manifest this hope through Habitat for Humanity.

I write this article to ask you to contribute to this wonderful organization and see the genuine hope that it spreads throughout the world. Our life is only one of many Habitat success stories. Please help to make more. Do not worry if you can't swing a hammer or if you don't have the funds to donate; all Habitat requires is a willing heart. There's always somewhere to help—errands in the office, providing lunch on the worksite, contributing monetarily, organizing fundraisers, building the houses, and more.

Please contact the Habitat office at 478-328-3388 or hoco-habitat@cbi.mgacoxmail.com for more information. Or, just come out to the worksite to find out what Habitat is all about! Habitat is currently building a home on Orchard Way, behind U-Haul on Watson Boulevard.