

A message from the 2009 *bike.home* family

My name is Kristin Ekern and I will soon be the proud owner of the first home built by Habitat for Humanity in Fillmore County. I was born and raised in the Rushford countryside, graduating from Rushford-Peterson High School in 1998. Growing up, I excelled academically, and had a plethora of lofty dreams about where life would take me. Truth be told, none of those lofty dreams were set in my hometown. But life is a dynamic thing, and sometimes the best course of action is not the one you planned.

My son Gabriel was born in September of 1998. I enrolled in Winona State University in the spring semester of 1999. I did reasonably well for a naïve young woman trying to work two jobs, attend school full-time, and care for my young son alone. I forged ahead for a couple of years by myself before meeting someone and eventually buying a home together in Bluffview Trailer Park. My first real home, which I thought would be my permanent residence, was a modest old trailer; nothing to brag about, but I was happy. Life got complicated and I was forced to leave school to focus on work and family. My daughter Annika was born in July 2005, bringing much happiness and fulfillment. However, our relationship suffered greatly, and I disregarded the multiple red flags in favor of blind optimism. Things ended badly in the spring of 2007, and I learned that I had been deceived about our joint ownership of the trailer. I was told to move out, as I had no legal right to the home. This was a devastating blow, as I had sacrificed my education and put all my eggs into the family basket. The house had been a home to me and my children, and it pained us greatly to leave. We rented the first apartment we looked at. Although the rent and other expenses associated with living alone were initially overwhelming, I knew with the support of family and friends, and a renewed faith in God that we would be all right.

As it turned out, everything worked out miraculously for the best. Two months after moving out on my own, Rushford was flooded. A block in either direction from my apartment was utter devastation. The trailer that I had just moved out of was completely submerged. Life for everyone in our town changed drastically that day, and has returned since to some semblance of normalcy.

If there is one thing I have learned in my journey into adulthood, it is that by the grace of God, all things are possible. I made many poor decisions in my youth, living recklessly, even dangerously, before a twist of fate forced me to examine my life and make the determination that I must turn it around. I have become an active member in recovery groups within my community, and get much fulfillment out of the spiritual growth experienced by myself and my friends. It is through one of these networks that I was encouraged to fill out an application for a Habitat for Humanity home. I reluctantly agreed, never expecting it to go far. Much to my surprise, I was selected to partner with Habitat! And thus began a most exciting journey!

My children and I are joyously anticipating each step in the process; finding a lot, meeting our neighbors, watching our home come together, one piece at a time. I was absolutely thrilled to learn that the home will be built using the Minnesota Green Communities criteria! I've always been passionate about environmental issues, and it had always been my dream to live

in a 'green' home; a dream that I was unable to visualize occurring anytime in the near future, as single-mother-waitresses are not known for their overwhelming success in life.

Truth be told, my children are most excited to have a cat. I've told them repeatedly, "Someday, someday when we have our own house, we'll be able to get a pet." Again, words that I didn't realize would become truth so soon! As well as a pet, a garden is something that I haven't been able to place in my backyard. I am eager to let my own piece of Earth bear fruit, and be beautified by bountiful flora; welcoming to the birds of the air and the insects of the ground (well, not *inside* my home). To have a backyard that can be a host to celebrations of childhood, gatherings of friends and family, and a haven for memories to grow. I want my children to grow up feeling safe and secure; to forget the hardship and unpleasantness of days past. I want them to have a special place that they will always think of as 'home', something that I was blessed to have growing up.

Perhaps most importantly, I want my children to grow up having an understanding of the value of community. For them to know that their home would not have been possible had it not been for the love and labor of their fellow citizens, is priceless. To understand that it takes each one of us contributing to make a beautiful thing out of the place in which we live... that is something that you can only gain an appreciation of first-hand, not from a book. I want my children to embrace the ideals espoused by Jesus; loving thy neighbor in thought and deed; becoming good people on the inside and out. I want them to continue to give back to the community throughout their lives.

I have grown a lot in the last two years. I no longer make decisions based solely on what I want to do. It is vitally important to me to be a contributing member of society. I am involved, or learning how to be involved, in groups and activities that I have a passion for. I love theatre and music, both participating and watching, and I do what I can with our local arts organization, RASA. I love helping people improve their lives, and consequently the lives of those around them; therefore I am active in spiritual and recovery groups. I love food; therefore I waitress, bake, aspire to become a successful gardener, and have loftier aspirations to get involved with localizing our food network. I love our natural world; therefore I have tried to get my foot in the door with a local water-management group. Perhaps the stability brought about by home ownership will allow me to finish my degree in Environmental Geoscience so that I can pursue a legitimate career in said field. I will continue striving to be an active participant in Rushford life. I am proud to reside in such a resilient, hard-working, profoundly spiritual community, and I am ridiculously blessed to be given the opportunity to become a homeowner in this community. Thank you Habitat for Humanity!