

Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation

A New House, a New Life --Three Families Report

By CECELIA VIGGO

The change of living which comes from improved housing has brought happiness to many families aided by the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation. This second in a series on the BSHF reports on three families, their names disguised.

"There (in a hut near the pond) dwelt John Field and his wife and several children. An honest, hard-working, but shiftless man plainly was John Field . . . born to be poor, with his inherited poverty or poor life, his boggy ways, not to rise in this world, he nor his posterity . . ." (from Walden by H. Thoreau)

Henry Thoreau like many of his contemporaries in the mid-19th Century, felt that that immigrant Irishman would never be deserving of anything better than his poor shack; that his poverty was the result of his own shiftlessness.

We all know that history proved Thoreau wrong. The Irish immigrant did, indeed, rise in this world.

Take a walk around Rochester's inner-city, down Hand and Weld streets, for example, and you'll soon learn that although the faces and places may have changed since Thoreau's commentary, the slums and shanties still persist.

So does the old belief that those who live in poverty and slums would not be able to take care of anything better.

Bishop Sheen felt otherwise. He gambled on the hope that living in a better home can lead to a better life. The organization he began in 1967, the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation, has financed down payments on homes for 26 families living in deplorable housing conditions.

A visit to several families aided by the housing foundation well illustrates that the Bishop's trust has been fulfilled.

I visited "Mrs. Jones" on a wintry Friday afternoon. As I approached the steps leading to the front door, one of her sons cleared away the snow from my path. Mrs. Jones greeted me at the door, and welcomed me into her 10 room home, newly-purchased with foundation help. We talked in the new living room, modestly furnished, but cheerful and comfortable.

Mrs. Jones explained that she and her 10 children had lived in an apartment in the inner-city. "It was a mess; the landlord wouldn't do anything." The apartment was large, eight rooms, but only two of those rooms were heated. "We used to huddle together, crowded into those two rooms, in the winter," she said.

Her new home has been the object of a three-year search. "I had been everywhere I could go, to try and find a new place," Mrs. Jones said. "Housing agencies couldn't find a rented flat or apartment big enough for all of us."

Finally, Mrs. Jones heard about the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation from a social worker at the Catholic Family Center. She applied for help on a Wednesday and by Saturday, Mrs. Jerome C. Cook of the Housing Foundation had visited the Jones' apartment. The following week, the Jones family was looking for homes with Augustus Niles, foundation realtor.

When asked about the advantages of home ownership, Mrs. Jones replied, "It just makes you feel important." She eagerly recounts her plans for remodeling her home: carpeting the living and dining areas, opening the attic, replacing the two small living room windows with a picture window, paneling interior walls.

Already, since the move last August, Mrs. Jones has painted the house, and repaired the back porch. Beyond the down payment, Mrs. Jones pays \$92 per month on house payments, some \$20 less than her former rent.

Mrs. Jones knows that her plans will take time. But she strikes you as both a serene and purposeful woman, and you know that, because of the Housing Foundation, somehow, someday all her dreams will slowly come true.

The "Smith" home was already trimmed for Christmas when I called in early December. "The 4-year-old's been after her father to decorate," Mrs. Smith explains.

The Smiths occupy an old home in the 19th Ward, whose high ceilings, many mantles, and doorways and hiding places must seem a happy place to the family's seven children.

Mr. Smith had been a church custodian, but found his salary not adequate to support his large family. He got a better paying job, and as a consequence, the Smith family had to leave the home provided by the church. Finding a decent place to live seemed a nearly impossible task.

Mrs. Smith wrote to Bishop Sheen, and asked for foundation help. He replied within a week. Soon, Mrs. Cook contacted the family, and the search for homes began.

The Smiths love their new home, and are grateful to the foundation. "We'd never had money enough for the down payment," Mrs. Smith commented. They find the four large bedrooms quite an improvement over the cramped custodian's quarters, where their eldest son had to sleep in the attic.

The Smiths plan some major repairs; electrical re-wiring and new plumbing will be necessary, and they also intend to side the house. They will receive a partial grant and long-term low-interest loan under the auspices of the Madison Neighborhood Conservation Program, a joint effort by the city and federal government to update and renovate the south side of Rochester.

The "Rodriguez" children are beautiful. They have big brown eyes and curly light brown hair, and they were fascinated by the stranger who had come to visit their mother and father.

Mrs. Rodriguez ushered me into her home, purchased with foundation help. I was amazed that the home, full of six growing children, should be so immaculate.

Mr. Rodriguez said the old apartment had "too many rats and roaches," and that "water leaked from the ceiling." The landlord refused to make the necessary repairs.

For five years, the family looked in vain for a new place to live. None of Rochester's housing organizations was able to help because the family was too large.

Then they learned that friends were moving from Rochester, and their house would be up for sale. They wanted very much to own this house, which they had visited often, and liked so well, in a neighborhood with many Spanish families. But they lacked the money for a down payment.

Father Robert Kreckel, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, and a family friend, was instrumental in getting foundation help to the Rodriguezes.

Mrs. Rodriguez proudly showed me her house. Focal point of the second floor, is a large shrine to the Blessed Virgin. Diverging from this point, were three spotless bedrooms, whose linoleum floors shined from hours of scrubbing.

Mr. and Mrs. Rodriguez are not fluent in English yet, but one doesn't need to know Spanish to realize that owning their own home is a constant source of pride and hope to them.



Children at inner city home will have a better home and play area because of aid from Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation.

be her knight
in shining
armor



This is the year to save your damsel from distress.

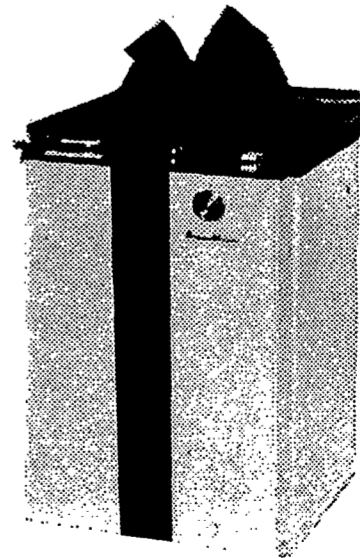
This is the year to let her feel like a queen instead of a scullery maid.

This is the year to give her the gift that keeps on giving, every day of the year.

This is the year to give her the gift that's at the top of her Christmas list.

This is the year to give her an automatic dishwasher—and be her knight in shining armor.

give her a
DISHWASHER
see your Appliance Dealer



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