



Habitat for Humanity seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world. Habitat invites people of all backgrounds, races and religions to build houses together in partnership with families in need. If you are interested in volunteering, visit www.habitat.org and search for your local affiliate or call 800-Habitat.



*Photo Courtesy of Sharp & Associates Public Relations.
Story: Suzanne Whang*

Much Ado About Something

The host of HGTV's *House Hunters* discovers that sometimes, the smallest contribution makes the biggest impact.

I'm a television host, actor, stand-up comedian and Yale graduate overachiever. I'm also a sucker for a good cause, but most of my charitable contributions have been financial. I wanted to do something more tangible for someone for a change.

I received an email from the Yale Club of L.A. about an upcoming Habitat for Humanity build in Lynwood, Calif. The email provided a checklist of what to bring, ending with "Be sure to bring your work gloves." Work gloves? Why would I own work gloves?

Although I regularly donate money to Habitat for Humanity, this would be my first time volunteering. I always wanted to participate in an actual build. Granted, I know nothing about actually building a house. At 5-feet 4-inches on a good day, and weighing in at 100 pounds soaking wet, I didn't have a lot of brute strength to offer. But I was assured that was not necessary for my participation. Perhaps my double-jointed thumbs could finally serve a purpose.

I prefer to wake up at the crack of noon, so I knew it would be challenging to wake up early on a Saturday morning. At 6:30 a.m., the voices in my head began. "Why on earth did you volunteer to do this? What were you thinking?" After finally winning the snooze alarm battle, I managed to throw some clothes on and make my way out the door. I got to the site right on time and began talking to one particularly friendly volunteer, Adrian. I told her I felt guilty because I didn't have time to buy work gloves. The overachiever in me was afraid I was going to get an "F" in volunteering. Adrian responded by saying, "Oh, I bought an extra pair," and handed them to me. Wow — what a role reversal.

After I signed a waiver form that said if I was stupid enough to step on a metal spike or get clocked in the head by a 2x4 it was all my fault, we were all introduced to the family who would be moving into this house. Habitat for Humanity requires that they must participate in building it. I was happy to meet the Gonzalez family — they were extremely gracious and grateful for the group of volunteers who showed up that day.

While driving to the build site, I had macho visions of carrying lumber, wearing a hard hat and using loud power tools. So I was a little disappointed when the site leader announced that the framing of the house was complete, so we were going to be painting all day. But I started to get excited when I realized that hey, I'm actually good at painting! I suddenly felt that I had something to contribute. I didn't have to worry about nailing my index finger to the front door.

I found myself standing side by side with a group of volunteers, painting the fence on the side of the house. In my overalls, with no makeup on, dripping with sweat as the day got progressively hotter, I found myself strangely euphoric. I knew that the spirit of camaraderie was making its way onto this fence.

So imagine my dismay when I saw that one of the volunteers was putting way too much paint on her brush, leaving huge globs of paint to drip down the fence! What's the matter with her? Where's her finesse? What should I do? I didn't want to embarrass her, so I waited until she went to get more paint, and then quickly ran over to smooth out the globs before she came back.

After lunch, I volunteered to paint the roof. As an acrophile who loves skydiving, hang-gliding and bungee jumping, painting a roof would be fun, right? Wrong! Once I was up there, I started to freak out. I had to fight my desire to come back down immediately. It was also about 110 degrees outside by now, and I was starting to lose my mind. But I reached inside myself for the chutzpah to finish what I started, and I did just that.

As I drove home, it hit me more deeply than ever before why *House Hunters* is the most popular show on HGTV. A big piece of the American dream is to own your own home — to have a place to hang your proverbial hat, fix it up exactly the way you want to, and exhale. In these days of ever-increasing workaholicism, it's more important than ever to have a sanctuary. It's a symbol of independence, and yet it simultaneously makes you feel more like part of the community.

By the time I got home, I was physically exhausted and covered in dirt, sweat and paint. It felt great. I left a trail of clothes from the front door to the bathroom, and appreciated a hot shower like never before. I felt the satisfaction of knowing that I put my sweat and my heart into a home for a very grateful family. This experience really put my problems into perspective, and reminded me to be grateful for all of the incredible blessings in my life. I have food, clothing, shelter, family, friends, freedom, opportunities, love and laughter in my life. I now own a pair of work gloves, and everything looks different to me now.

Much ado about something, indeed.