

Amanda (Seidl) Rayman – Partner Family Story 6.9.11

I was in 6th grade when my mom, Cindy, decided it was time for us leave the bad situation we in. She wanted my little sister Lia and I to grow up in a much more positive and supportive environment. As a new single mom -- finding safe, affordable housing was definitely a challenge in the lakes area. For a few months – Mom, Lia and I all shared a bedroom at my grandparents. We were able to move into transitional housing in Aitkin but could only stay 9 months. After that we moved to a small one-bedroom cabin near Garrison—complete with avocado green appliances. Lia and I shared the bedroom and mom slept on a pull out sofa in the living room. The cabin was never meant to be used year round – during the two winters we lived there; I remember it being cold all the time. The cabin was also equipped with the smallest hot water heater you can possibly imagine – it seemed as soon as you got your hair all lathered up, the water would turn ice cold. Between the cold temps and cramped space, it was nearly impossible for me or Lia to focus on school work. While everyone else in school would play cards or gossip during study hall – I actually had to do my homework cause I knew I wouldn't be able to get it done at home. For little Lia, life at the cabin was much worse. One winter she seemed to get a new round of strep throat every few weeks. Eventually the doctors were so concerned Lia had to have a spinal tap to check for Meningitis. I know it just broke my mom's heart to watch her innocent little girl go through such a painful procedure. Mom did her best to hide it from us but I could tell she was worried and stressed out all the time.

Then in 1998 everything changed for our family. We moved into our Habitat House in Ironton the day after Thanksgiving. As a 15 year old girl I was so excited that for first time in years -- I had not only my own bed but my own room to sleep in. At that age I didn't fully understand the greater changes this new stability would bring to our lives. When I look back now – I'm not sure what would have happened to my family had we not been selected by Habitat. I am, however, confident that none of us would be doing as well as we are now. Little Lia is now 20 years old and recently bought her first home. She is working with Special needs students for the St. Francis School district and taking classes at Metro State. Mom has advanced to the director level at Central Lakes Medical Clinic and continues to live at our Habitat home in Ironton. Last year mom married a great guy and he brought his two adult daughters into our family as well.

As for me, the greatest difference having a stable home made in my life was my ability to focus on my school work. Whether it was seeing the tremendous weight lifted off mom's shoulders or the simple joy of being able to completely wash my hair with hot water – the stress and worry that had distracted me from my studies before was gone. I began taking accelerated math courses and even earned a scholarship to study as a foreign exchange student in Germany for part of my junior year. In 2003, I graduated as Valedictorian of Crosby-Ironton High School and started Luther College with nearly a full year of college credits completed. Three years later I graduated Sum Cum Laude with a double major in Mathematics and Business Management. After completing my bachelor's degree, I started working as a production supervisor at Hormel Foods in Austin, MN. In 2009 while working full time I returned to school to pursue a Masters degree in Industrial Engineering from the University of Minnesota. I officially completed my degree a few weeks ago and have joined the engineering team at Hormel Foods. My

husband and I currently own a small farm in southern Minnesota and look forward to starting a family in the next few years.

Like I said before, at 15 years old I didn't fully understand how significantly my life was changing. I also didn't appreciate the help we were getting as much as I should have. Sure I helped paint and get our house ready but I never really helped at any of the other sites. I was a teenager and was too wrapped up in my own life to consider the needs of a stranger. Just as those teenage years are long gone, my self-centered laziness is too – at least most days it is. When my husband and I married a couple years ago, we had just a simple country wedding and encouraged our guests to make donation in our honor instead of buying us gifts. We wanted to celebrate our special day by helping improve the lives of others through organizations that had changed our lives. In the end, sizeable checks were written out for cancer research, academic scholarships, and of course the Lakes Area Habitat for Humanity.

And now in closing, I leave you with a quote from a Nigerian poet named Ben Okri. He writes, "The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering." All of which are much easier when organizations and people such as yourselves are willing to help those in need. Thank you and enjoy the rest of the evening.