

In 1984 after graduating from high school, Marlene Cheshire purchased a plot of land in Pine River. That year she met her husband and together they found an old house in Backus and moved it to their property. But as Marlene states, "Life happens." The couple separated for two years, but in 1986 reconnected and married.

A job took them to California where their first two children, Anton and Rose were born. The loss of the husband's carpenter job brought them back to Pine River and a home that for three years had no electricity, no sewer and no water. Marlene proudly says, "We rewired the old house, insulated, put windows and doors in and scratched by."

During this time their third child, Clyde was born. At about seven months, Clyde was diagnosed with neurological disabilities that affected his speech and social development.

Life with her husband was not easy. An abusive alcoholic, he left the family when Clyde was three. The family has heard little from him over the years and Marlene has been unable to get financial support from him.

Wanting a home that the kids could be proud of and feel comfortable inviting friends into, Marlene purchased a new mobile home in 2005. But disaster struck in more ways than one. The title company she had been employed with suddenly went out of business. She was forced to declare bankruptcy, but valiantly tried to hang onto the new house.

She found another job, but at a lower salary. In an effort to make ends meet, she lowered the coverage on her home insurance. She could not afford propane that winter, so installed a wood heater. That in turn, led to a fire and the loss of home and belongings.

But there was a back-up plan as Marlene states, "The old house, which had saved us in hard times before saved us again. I feel really badly that they (the children) had to live there all their childhood, embarrassed and ashamed. But we had a roof over our heads." She continues, "The addition we added to the old house is crumbling with each rain. The old part does not leak but is such a cave. I am thankful for this old house even though I hate living here. So much work, time and money into it."

It was Marlene's now grown daughter, Rose who put her mother's name on the LAHFH waiting list to be notified for the 2010 application round. Marlene's words regarding the prospect of building her new home are ones of regret that is outweighed by hope and thankfulness; "As much as I wish I could give it to all my children, I hope they are happy for this new house as a stable future for me and Clyde- for me as I get older and for Clyde to have a place even after I have passed. Getting a Habitat house is kind of like winning the lottery and it is still not real to me yet. It is such an emotional event and I am thankful to Rosie, my angel and precious daughter and to Habitat for Humanity.