

Decent, Safe, and Sanitary Housing

by Mary Lou Miller

I grew up in a small midwestern town in a nice, quiet neighborhood of middle-class working people. After I finished high school and my childhood sweetheart returned from the Korean War, we married. My husband was in school when we were expecting our first child. Our little town was growing. A new highway cut through my old childhood neighborhood, and our town's first public housing was built nearby. On our limited income, we qualified for a unit. Ironically, our new home was located precisely where my childhood home had been.

Living in public housing gave us the opportunity for my husband to finish school. We really appreciated HUD's helping hand. We both managed to get good jobs and were eventually able to save enough to buy our own home. This was the norm for everyone who lived in the complex. The average family stayed in public housing only 4 years or less.

When my husband was 47 years old, he had a disabling heart attack, and our lives changed dramatically. We had to leave the Midwest because the weather was too severe for my husband's weakened health to tolerate, but paying our bills had left us financially devastated. We moved to California near our daughter's home where, once again, HUD helped us acquire an affordable home. Ours is one of thousands of recovery stories among residents of public housing. HUD helps senior citizens and the physically challenged to recover from circumstances beyond their control.

My husband and I thank God every day for our beautiful home, and we thank HUD for being there for us and others when we are in need. Today I am honored to be a member of the board of commissions for our county housing authority. I hope and pray to be able to help others as my husband and I were helped.

Mary Lou Miller has been married for 38 years and has two children. She worked as an inspector in a shoe factory in the Midwest for 15 years, and her husband was employed as a supervisor for the U.S. Post Office Department. In 1983 they moved to California where they have been active in many community organizations, including the Housing Authority of Santa Barbara. They are proud that their housing complex received a Beautification Award from their local chamber of commerce.