

A Tale of Two Houses *continued from page 8*

be a busy, upcoming, holiday season. The Eyrricks registered with the quickly organized, local CCFR and started looking for ways and resources to repair their home. In the initial months after the flood no one was really sure what kind of help would be available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Many families, businesses, and community entities were put on hold, waiting for answers to questions.

The Clever Cricket was untouched by the flood waters, one less thing the family would need to deal with.

The Eyrricks stayed with the Adams family for a month and a half. Next they borrowed and lived in a trailer; eventually they purchased their own trailer and parked it at their home as they worked to repair it, living partially in the house, partially in the trailer. Believing that they could receive help from FEMA to lift their home, they worked to put the house and lives back together. They took out a SBA loan to do the repairs and purchased replacement furniture. They worked with contractors for over a year, rebuilding the home they loved.

"And then we discovered that FEMA changed their rules and they were not going to improve any property that was in the designated Flood Way," explains Camrin. "The maps had been changed and our house was now in the Flood Way."

FEMA would eventually change these rules again and allow improvements in the Flood Way, but that was after the Eyrricks had already changed course.

The Eyrricks now went back to the drawing board with CCFR and arranged for a buyout of their damaged home at pre-flood value. Community Action Team (CAT) a non-profit that helps people with affordable housing and was now managing CCFR, was putting together a program to develop several affordable homes on Corey Hill in Vernonia for people who had been bought out by FEMA. The Eyrricks, working with CAT's Casey Mitchell were put on the list and were scheduled to be moved as part of the second round of new homes.

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The flood had a tremendous impact on the community as a whole and on individuals. Everyone deals with personal disaster differently. The fear that it could flood again is very

real, especially for people who were severely impacted, even when it might seem somewhat irrational. For Kaitlyn, who had skipped a grade in school that fall and was adjusting to a new set of school friends and classmates, it meant trouble sleeping. Jacob, normally laid back and easygoing, suffered from anger issues.

"Anytime that it rained at all, even when the river is low and there is no way it's going to flood because the river bed is visible—I would be checking the river levels three and four times a day, really neurotic about it," says Camrin. "That's how I've spent the last three years."

Since the flood the Eyrrick family has lived in a constant state of flux. During the '08-'09 winter a high water scare sent the whole community



Kaitlyn Eyrrick's bedroom with open walls.

into motion—the Eyrrick packed up and spent over a week living on high ground after moving their trailer to friends Kinnell and John Steward's house. Personal items stayed packed away in boxes. Little used items were difficult to find.

In the midst of all this family turmoil, Brandon, who had been suffering from periodic numbness in his hand and arm, was diagnosed with an undetected birth defect-- a Chiari Type 2 Malformation. "Basically his skull is undersized and his brain was being pushed out and into his spinal column," explains Camrin. Brandon underwent major neurosurgery, and things went well. Another major hurdle negotiated for this family that continued to persevere.

The Eyrricks began working

with CAT to plan for their new home. Camrin had her eye on a particular lot she really liked but that lot was already taken. She picked out a floor plan she thought would work that was being constructed for someone else; unfortunately that



The inside of the Eyrrick's Juniper Street house.

plan would not be available for their lot. "I remember daydreaming about it, even though that wasn't going to be our home," says Camrin. "And then I got a call telling me that one of the families had dropped out of the first round and they asked us to come in—and it just happened to be the lot we liked with the floor plan we wanted! So it totally worked out!"

Believing they would be moving soon, the family stopped work on their old house, leaving it partially repaired. Unfortunately nothing is easy in this story. The process of completing their new house, working through all the red tape and paperwork, with constant changes and adjustments to rules and funding took almost eighteen more months.

Camrin acted as her family's advocate, writing letters, making phone calls, monitoring legislation through congress and constantly visiting with the caseworkers and staff at CCFR.

With the FEMA buyout and grant funding package that CCFR identified and put together the Eyrricks were basically able to make a straight trade--their flood damaged and partially repaired home for a brand new home. "The house trade was truly a work of magic," explained Camrin. "Many entities were involved, but CAT's Casey Mitchell in particular should be credited with making the house swap possible. It was not a very clear cut trade or an easy

thing to get done."

Camrin also wanted to recognize the work of CCFR throughout the entire three-plus year process. "Everyone's flood case and financial situations are so varied and different, and what CCFR was able to do for individuals is varied and unique," says Camrin. "Unfortunately there is no easy cookie cutter process that could be used for everyone's case. We are so grateful for all they were able to do for us."

"It was a pleasure to work with the Eyrrick family," says CCFR's Dan Brown. "They were so patient as we waded through the seemingly endless miles of red tape to make this project a reality for them. Through it all they were always quick to express their thanks for the work being done on their behalf."

Kaitlyn, now eleven, is thrilled with the new house. "Nothing is broken or falling down like at our old house," she says. "It's so nice to have a floor to walk on and walls painted the same colors and light fixtures that work."

"After feeling like there was no hope, we really believe that we have been truly blessed," says Camrin. "Things may not end up the way you want them too, but they always seem to work out. It's just amazing to me."

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Camrin continues to carry around what can only be described as a "sunny disposition" in the wake of the torrential downpours of December 2007 and offers an interesting perspective on everything that her family has endured. "In some crazy way I think that the flood was a blessing in a lot of ways," she says. "It brought us closer to people who were friends and acquaintances, who are now like family. It renewed my faith in so many ways—that there is still good out there."

In early October of this year, when the weather seemed to change and the rain and those cool, foggy, Vernonia mornings returned, the Eyrrick found themselves snug in their new home. "Sometime around three in the morning I was woken up by a really hard rain, and the wind was really blowing hard," remembers Camrin. "Since the flood, that kind of thing would have woke me up and kept me awake the rest of the night. Brandon woke up and said, 'Do you hear that rain?' And I said, 'Yes,' and went right back to sleep."

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