



HABITAT STORIES

< Story 1 | Chapter 3

LAURA MANNING

DREAM COME TRUE

Laura, Aidan, and Emily Manning endured COVID-19 and homelessness. They now dreamed of their new Habitat home in Wylie, Texas. Bedrooms, backyards, and puppy dogs filled their minds at night while homeless shelters, long workhours, and sweat equity weekends filled their days. Was there just another painful setback ahead, or finally would their dream come true?



Laura Manning and her kids Aidan and Emily lived at the Samaritan Inn (a comprehensive program for the homeless in McKinney) for almost a year and a half. Although difficult, it enabled Laura to focus on her family, online college classes, work at the McKinney homeless youth shelter, and the completion of her sweat equity hours. She even made the time to help other future Habitat homeowners with their home construction on the weekends.

Due to Laura's hard work and progress, the Samaritan Inn was able to help her move into an apartment in McKinney. Emily and Aidan were now nine and ten years old and entering 4th and 5th grades in September 2020. In October, work on Laura's Habitat home was completed. She was now able to make plans to move from her apartment to her new Habitat home in Wylie. Her home dedication ceremony was scheduled for November 7, 2020.

After ten years, Laura Manning's dream came true. She officially received the keys to her new Habitat home. It was a cool sunny Saturday in November. The banners and bunting were displayed proudly. The Mayor of Wylie welcomed Laura and her family to their community on the eve of the city's 133rd birthday. State Representative Candy Noble's chief of staff presented Laura with a flag flown over the state capitol. It was all overwhelming and almost did not seem real, but thankfully it was.

After receiving the Ron Van Wyk Golden Hammer Award for the hardest worker on the construction sites, Laura was asked to say a few words. "I want to start by thanking Habitat for this amazing opportunity. When we started the program, we were at the Samaritan Inn..." Laura went on to talk about working on the construction sites. She choked up when saying, "I was talking to my son one day, and he goes, 'I can't wait until I'm old enough so that I can go out to the construction sites to help other families too.' I thought that was just so amazing." Aidan hugged her, and Habitat CEO Celeste Cox presented Laura with the keys to her new Habitat home. Laura did not realize at this time that the greatest changes were yet to come.

Laura was officially a first-time homeowner. Her home was a modest four-bedroom with a fenced backyard and painted patriotic red, white, and blue. Laura, Aidan, and Emily settled in quickly, and Laura began to see changes in their home life soon after moving in.

“They definitely have their own space. They walk to school and back home now. They can also ride their bikes because they are able to get bikes now. There's a park right down on our street at the end of our block. So they go there and play.

Emily and Aidan are more willing and wanting to learn how to start, like making dinners and stuff to help. Aidan likes doing chicken. Emily kind of throws stuff in the pot like soup. She likes that. It normally has a bunch of vegetables. Then we do the ground beef on the stove and then put it in there.

We have a nice backyard, and we have a hammock out there. So I get to chill in the hammock while the kids run around. We also kick the soccer ball and throw it too.”

Along with moving into their new home, Aidan and Emily transferred to the Wylie schools. Laura has seen amazing changes in her children's school and social lives since they started their new schools in 2020 and over the next two years.

“My daughter got more help with school work, which she needed. My son was always bored in school, and Wylie was the first school district that actually said, 'okay we'll put him in advanced classes.' He's been much better since then.

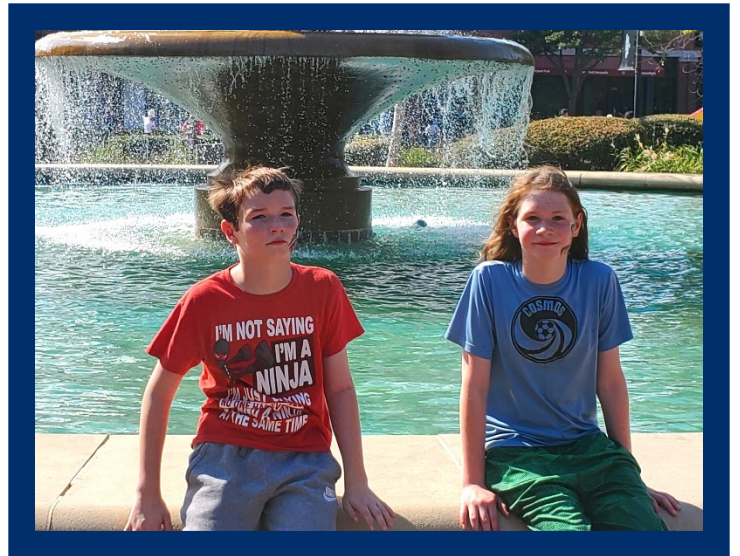
Now we've been in the house for almost two years so they've been at the same school. The only thing that changes is when they go to a different school because of their age. They're able to do soccer now. They're both in the band. The friends they're making are the friends they're going to stick with for the rest of their lives or at least their lives until they finish High School.

We go to the Wylie Youth Soccer Association because that's what my son has done for the past two seasons. Even that is amazing because sometimes I can't take them to games. So I can call his coach and he comes and picks them up and they go.

Aidan is going to play soccer for his school this year (2022). He's going into seventh grade. Emily just started soccer this year. She plays with the recreational league in Wylie just like Aidan did.”

Moving into a new home is one thing, but moving into a new community is another. Laura, Aidan, and Emily moved from a homeless shelter, and then to an apartment in McKinney, and finally to their forever home in Wylie. Laura expected this new community to be different, and she was delightfully surprised.

“Everyone's really friendly, even those that aren't with Habitat. My kids have made so many friends just from the neighborhood, and they go play with them.



We have a church that is right across the street from our house. They do different events throughout the year. They do caroling around Christmas time. They come knocking on all the doors and sing for us. The whole Wylie community is really friendly and helpful.”

Along with a new home, new schools, and a new community, after many hours of long hard schoolwork, Laura received her new Master’s Degree in Psychology.

“I recently just finished my Master's Degree in Psychology. That was a huge accomplishment. I'm trying to get into that career now which of course, it's going to take some time. I need to do some internships, but just having that ability to get that degree when I didn't think I'd be able to afford it.

I want to use it to get into counseling to help. I'm hoping just more towards the juvenile side since that's what most of my degrees are in. For anything from addiction to family counseling, just really anything, [I just want] to help someone that's in need.”

This year the Mannings added a new member to their family. A German Shepherd mix named “Pepper.”

“We actually have a dog now. It's a German Shepherd mix. She just turned a year old. She's almost got her CGC (Canine Good Citizen by the American Kennel Club) certification. She's getting that on Sunday, and then she'll be starting her service dog training.”

Once Pepper is a certified service dog, Laura looks forward to taking Pepper to work with her. Laura believes strongly that Pepper can help connect with the juveniles she works with at the homeless shelter.

Although it has been almost two years since Laura’s home dedication, she knows Habitat Collin County is only a phone call away if she has a question, has a problem, or just wants to talk with Habitat friends she has made along the way.

“Habitat’s always there if I have any questions about something that's going wrong with my house. I can contact them, and then they can give me the number or contact.

They help me out if any of my warranty contracts are not within the year or the time frame that they're available. Then they tell you who’s a good person to call to help you out so that you’re not going to be having to spend a ton of money to fix it.”

Laura is not someone that waits around for something to happen, she is always thinking about what is next in her life. Laura decided that the next thing she wants to do is give back to Habitat by becoming a Habitat Mentor.

“I’m hoping to become a Habitat Mentor. I don’t know much about it yet. What I do know is that it is when new families come into the Habitat program they get a mentor. This mentor walks them (future Habitat homeowners) through the whole process.

The mentor helps them to get sweat equity hours and helps them select different parts of their house such as the floors, the countertops, the cabinets, and even the appliances that they



need. Habitat Mentors meet with the future homeowners to make sure that the process is going fine, to answer any questions, and to make sure they're meeting the hours that they need. The Habitat Mentor makes sure that they're able to make it the whole way through."

When we caught up with Laura this year, we were astonished at all the changes that she, Aidan, and Emily have been through since the dedication of their new Habitat home on that cool Saturday in November almost two years ago. The changes in their home life, schools, social life, community, higher education, and even new family members were incredible. Laura Manning never expected COVID-19 to leave her jobless, penniless, and homeless. But she found the opportunity through Habitat to pull herself up by her bootstraps, turn her life around, and make her homeownership dream finally come true. Laura now has a new foundation on which she is building a better life for her family.

"I think Habitat is such an important program because they not only helped me, they help so many people who can't afford an apartment because rents keep going up and jobs don't necessarily go up in pay just because of that. They help people who have had a rough time not necessarily because of something they did, but just because of life."

- Laura Manning, North Texas Native, Single Parent, US Army Veteran, Bachelors in Criminal Justice, Homeless Shelter Case Manager, Masters in Psychology, and Habitat Homeowner



**Chapter 2:
Turning Her
Life Around**

**Chapter 3:
Dream
Come True**

Please consider making a gift to help someone like Laura Manning go from homeless to Habitat homeowner.

northtexasgivingday.org/organization/HabitatforHumanityofCollinCounty

© Habitat for Humanity of Collin County

2060 Couch Drive, McKinney, TX 75069