



HOME SWEET HOME

A Collection of Essays and Poems

20 in celebration of the
FAMILY HOUSING FUND'S
th Anniversary 1980–2000

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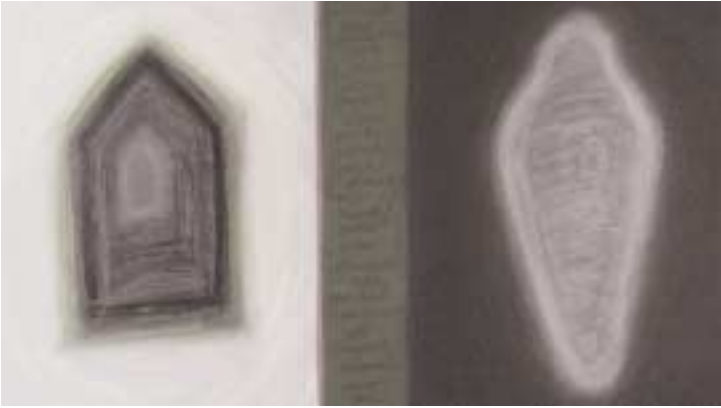
The Family Housing Fund is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve and expand quality affordable housing for families with low and moderate incomes in the seven-county metropolitan area of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The Fund was established in 1980 by The McKnight Foundation and the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Currently, the Twin Cities face an affordable housing crisis. Rents continue to climb while vacancy rates remain under 2 percent and home prices escalate. Homelessness among people of all ages, including children, has risen sharply. More and more working families find themselves unable to locate and afford a place to live.

In order to raise consciousness of the growing need for affordable housing and to celebrate its 20th anniversary, the Family Housing Fund is sponsoring “Home Sweet Home: An Affordable Housing Art Exhibit.”

Through the work of 23 local artists, the art exhibit portrays a wide range of housing situations and circumstances—from the stark images of homelessness to the celebrations of a family moving into



Steve Olson | **Park Bench** | 1996, oil on wood construction, 22 x 31 in.



Camille Gage | **In the Heart of the Real** | 2000, acrylic, pastels, chalk, graphite, 60 x 40 in.

its first home. Several artists worked with children living in affordable housing to create images of what it means to have a home. The Fund also sponsored a poetry/essay contest for residents and children living in affordable housing. The winning entries are displayed throughout the exhibit as well.

This booklet highlights the work of the 14 essay and poetry winners, ages 9 to 43. Entrants were asked to write an essay or poem that describes how having a stable, safe, and affordable place to live has affected their lives. Entries came from children and adults living in Twin Cities' affordable rental housing, supportive housing, and privately owned homes. A special thanks to all the residents who participated in the contest, our partners in affordable housing who helped get the word out, and to the judges on the Family Housing Fund's Public Education Advisory Committee. The complete exhibit can be viewed on our Web site at www.fhfund.org.

The Family Housing Fund is deeply grateful to these artists, children, and residents who, through their talents and efforts, have helped us uniquely convey the importance of affordable housing in our community. The Fund would like to especially thank The McKnight Foundation, The St. Paul Companies, and The Minneapolis Foundation for their contributions to the Fund's Public Education Initiative. Without their support, this exhibit would not have been possible.

P O E M S



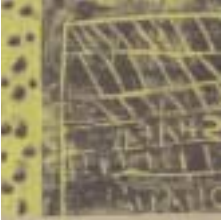
Theresa Smith and children from Calibre Ridge | **The Heart of the Nest** | 2000, ceramic tile, 48 in. diameter



Lori Greene and Gustavo Lira | **Untitled** | details, 2000, quilting, 87 in. diameter

My Room | Michael LaDoucer, age 9

My room is blue, it's real cool.
It keeps me safe at night.
I never fight.
I ride my bike.
I like to fly a kite.
But most of all,
I like my room.
And now I say goodnight.



Russell Hamilton and children from New Village | **UMUZI: The Dream Dwelling** | details, 2000, monoprint on plywood, 96 x 32 in.

Safe | Gemma Kirby, age 10

I lie awake long after my family has gone to sleep
I feel safe
I stare at the lamp outside my window, strangely blurred from the fog
and the ripping wind
Rain is fogging my window
I feel safe
Violent streaks of shimmering bolts of light streak across the sky
Dark clouds blur my vision as I stare out at the starless sky
The trees wave their branches as if in protest
The violent wind rapes the branches of their leaves
I feel safe
I lay awake long after my family has fallen asleep
I feel safe
at home
I feel safe

This is my home...
Where I can look out
the big windows that
Light our house so nice.

This is my home...
Where there's enough
Running water for everyone.

This is my home...
Where I can go out
and play in the big yard.

This is my home...
Where I don't have to share
a room with my brother.

This is my home...
Where flowers grow so
nice around our house.

This is my home...
Where I can do my homework
peacefully because the neighborhood is so quiet.

It's all a person needs.
Thank you, for making this be my new home.

“Home Sweet Home”

I said to myself as

I looked at our

New house.

There’s everything

A person needs.

What else could

A person want?

Two doors to enter

In the house,

Windows making rooms

So nice,

Bathroom sink

That makes a living link,

A roof to cover our

Heads from rain,

And a big backyard

Where we can play.

“Home Sweet Home”

This is my home!

Unshaken
Misunderstood
Brought up in torment and surviving hell
Rising up and defying gravity
Unheard of.

Undecided and forgotten
Stormed through this life
Lost.

Adolescent rage and teary nights
Nowhere to run
Abused and misused
Undiscovered.

Found
Light at the end
Discovered and reborn
Supported, enlightened
Home...

Understood and refined
Defiance and gravity...
Never undone.

The brightening sun breaks overhead,
As waking children climb out of bed.

Breakfast first... then we make haste,
School begins. Let's not be late.

New clothes aside... I'm full of pride
As they await their bus ride.

Unknown to them was stress and fear,
We never knew would help appear.

The day moves on with effort and learning,
Slow at first and then with ease.

One by one we're all returning,
Home beckons us in all her peace.

Clouds aloft in the evening sky,
Laughing children passing by,

A quiet moment just to breathe...
Giving thanks for what's received.

I never would have dreamed I'd be in a place
Where living check to check would become the norm.
Where school-supply shopping and clothing for kids
Would become like fighting a giant storm.

I was a college grad, married with kids,
When hubby's job was suddenly lost,
Went from plenty to nothing just overnight,
Now would our family have to pay the cost?

Just happened upon some new townhomes
To be built by the former HRA,
It would be large enough to fit us all
And affordable to this family in disarray.

"WE GOT IN!" I cried when the news did come,
"Thank you, God, for what you provide!"
Our rent went down and groceries came easier,
All because of an affordable place to abide.

But it wasn't over yet, you see my husband later left us,
A mom and four kids starting over again,
Again left with nothing, but I had this place
Called HOME where I could begin.

Divorce took everything out of us,
Yet two things gave us ability:
The love and provision God showed toward us,
And having our home provided stability.

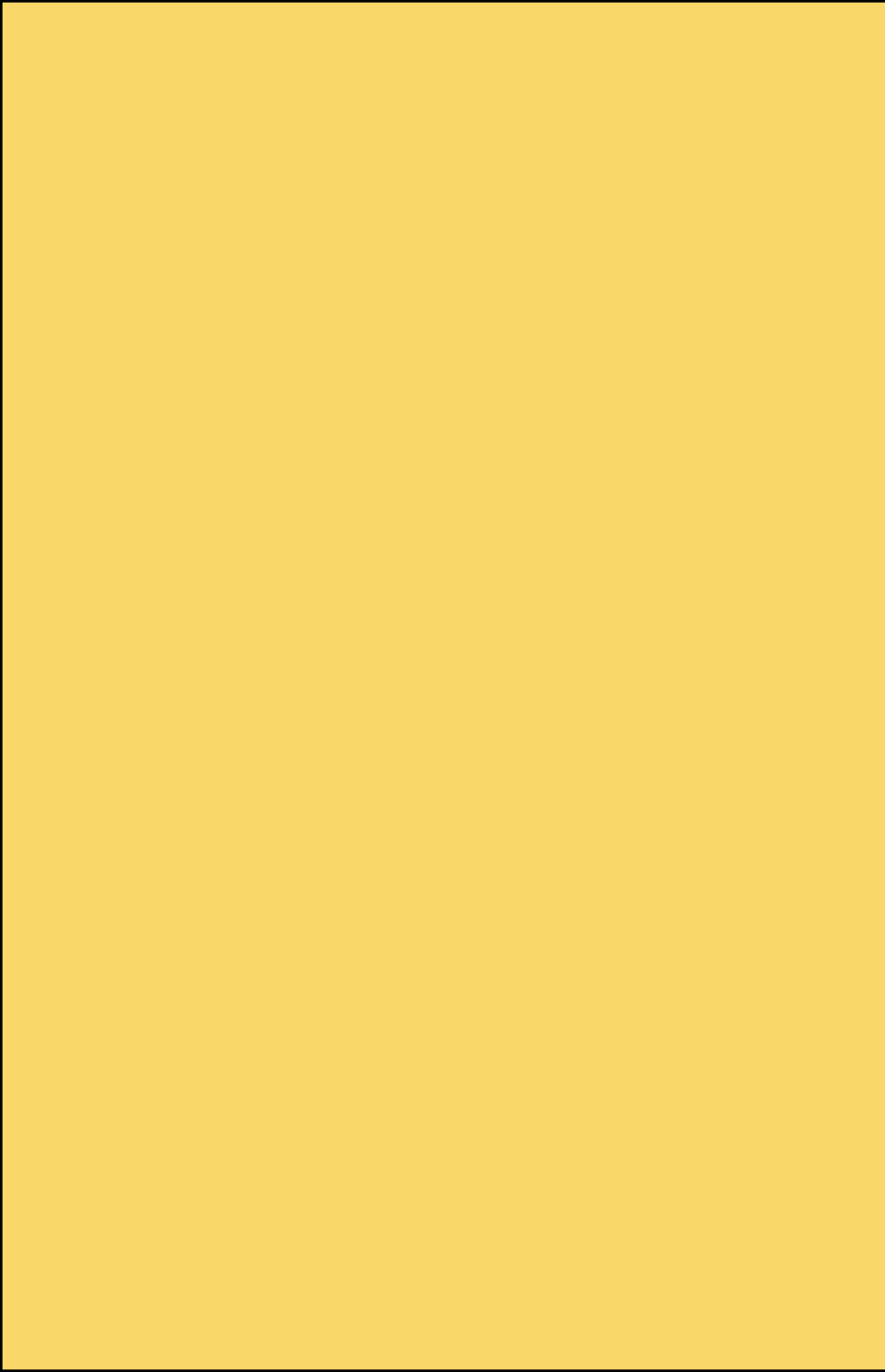


Tracy Moos | **Across the Street** | 1997, watercolor, 16 x 12 in.

Because our home has been an affordable place,
We were blessed to be able to remain,
The kids did not have to be uprooted,
And their friends and school stayed the same.

It's made such a difference in the lives of my kids
To have a stable place to call HOME,
In safety and comfort and continuity for them
And the ability for me to continue on.

I just want to say thank you for providing this place
Where we have begun our lives over again,
And I hope that someday someone else can take my place,
When I move on with the rest of God's plan.



ESSAYS



Jane Evershed | Homelessness: Playing with Fire | 2000, oil on canvas, 33 x 43 in.

HAVING A STABLE AND SAFE PLACE TO LIVE has had a dramatic effect upon my life. The liberation in being able to come and go from my apartment without being under some sense of threat has enabled me to establish closer relationships with my neighbors and in my community. It has been a beautiful gift to get up in the morning and feel safe enough to go out into our yard and feed the birds or just relax in the sun. To come home at night and find only peace in our hallways, the quietness of care. Or to gather together with my neighbors in a tornado warning.

I didn't even know such support, considerations and care were even available for someone at my income level. Affordable housing has opened many new doors for me, along with renewed self-respect and a sense of prosperity and hope. Living here has shown me that I can be in a better place, that I can sustain my own home, and that responsibility isn't something to be avoided, but to be taken on because it is worth it, we are worth it. A home can be where we start from, to reach higher, a safe haven to come and go from, a base that must be stable, manageable, and healthy.

I imagine a great future for myself now. I couldn't say that a few years ago. Back then, I heard gun shots in the night; now I listen to crickets. Back then, my windows were bolted and sealed shut; now the evening breeze fills my room. You decide which has given me a more positive outlook, which has created peace and hope. I already know.



Anne Brink | **The Housewarming** | detail, 2000, acrylic on muslin, 72 x 60 in.

WELL, IT WAS BACK IN THE BEGINNING OF '99. My family and I were staying in the Northside projects, but we had to move from there because those apartment buildings were gonna be knocked down. So we moved, we moved over Northeast, because Section 8 housing helped us get that place, but anyway we were there a month and got evicted 'cause my brother and sisters and I brought the wrong people over and they caused trouble.

Then we moved in with my aunt and cousins. We stayed there three and a half months and got kicked out by her because she thought my parents drank too much, so she kicked us out. Then we moved into the shelter and stayed there a month and a half or so, but my parents came back to the shelter drunk, and they said we couldn't go back there anymore. So we put all of our stuff in storage and stayed on the streets because we had nowhere to go, and to tell you the truth, it was scary.

Me and my sisters stayed under this bridge with a couple of other homeless people, but we knew them, and my mom and dad stayed under a different bridge. My dad sometimes has seizures, so that was scary for my mom because they are under a bridge and that is really scary. My brother, he stayed with friends, so he was all right. Plus, he is a year older than me, so he'll be all right out there.

As for me and my sisters, when we were hungry, we had to go to the Salvation Army truck or to churches to eat. When we took showers, we went to a shelter or to a friend's house. We had to wear our same clothes for about a couple of weeks until a friend gave us a change of clothes.

Man, I had a hard time out there. I didn't know being homeless would be that bad, but I was scared. I thought it was a dream, but a dream where I would never wake up. It was more like a nightmare. Being homeless isn't fun. I'm sad that I had to experience being homeless. I never thought I would be homeless ever, because I see other people that are homeless and dirty, and I feel sorry for them because I know how it was, and I never want to be homeless again.

I heard of people that were dying out there because they were homeless. I was always scared because I didn't know if we were gonna end up dead. I'm glad we're not, and I am happy we survived it.

Now we have a really nice home because this very nice lady helped us get this place, and I want to thank her so much for getting us off the streets. I have a nice home, and I'm in school now. I'm doing better than a year ago, my worst nightmare ever.

I am glad we have our new house because now I have my own room and a kitty cat named Mittens. And my room is just my size. I have my own room where I can put up posters and other pictures, and I have a stereo. That's why I'm happy I have a house.

I'm also happy we got a nice home, 'cause when a friend asks, "Where do you live?," I'll just say, "Over south in a nice house." We have a phone, so if anything important happens, someone can call us or we can call out, and we can keep in touch with everyone. I am happy we have a phone because my mom is happy, and that makes us all happy. Thanks for the house.



Ta-coumba Aiken | **Home Is Where the Heart Is?** | 2000, acrylic on muslin, 48 x 24 in.

Untitled | Jennifer Lee, age 12

HAVING A STABLE, SAFE, AND AFFORDABLE PLACE TO LIVE makes me feel strong and responsible. Strong, for letting me have my own place to run around in, and besides that, I feel strong to be proud of my house. And responsible, having my own house makes me feel that I should keep it clean. A house to me was always an umbrella, and a warm fireplace.

I think where you live determines what kind of person you are. Living in the suburbs is much quieter than the city. It's so peaceful and quiet there. Camping is not a place you'd live in forever but I camp so much, it's like a home for me. When I lived in the city, I would go shopping and watch television, and sometimes get bored. When I go camping, I'm a whole lot different. I never seem to get bored. There's always fishing, cooking by the fireplace, writing in my journal, and so many hiking trails that I could never finish. I get really dirty outdoors, but not like in the

city when I go shopping or stay home. It's almost like being an outdoor and indoor person at the same time, but that just goes to show how much people can change just by their surroundings.

Having my own home made me learn that having a place to live was the most important thing of all. Everything starts life by having a place to live and a place to call home. I'm really thankful for my parents, because first of all they found a great place for me and they raise me every day as I grow.

To me my home always felt safe. And that makes me more independent because I could ride my bike or rollerblade back and forth on the sidewalk and not worry much about anything bad happening. I think that one of the most interesting feelings about people is feeling safe. That's the part in our mind that tells us what's right and what's wrong. Living in a home makes me learn many things while I grow up. It teaches me how to be strong, responsible, safe, independent, and it also helps me remember how much my parents care about me. So far, I have been living in my house for about five years now. I like my house and the best things that I like to do on sunny days is to listen to soft music, open my window by my bed and lay down on the bed and close my eyes. Having a home of my own makes me feel more free and relaxed. Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to have a home of my own. And maybe having a home is supposed to support you and prepare you for your future. Who knows? There must be many answers to why people (or animals) have their own place called "home." And now... I think that having a stable, safe, and affordable place to live affected my life by teaching me many things that I discovered all by myself.

MY LIFE IS MORE ENJOYABLE NOW that I live with my mother. Before I came to live here, I was living with my aunt, and I didn't like it that much. It just didn't feel right.

When I was a little girl, I used to sleep next to my mom and I would feel so safe. I remember in the morning I would hear my mom's voice waking me. I would spend all day every day with my mother.

Then my mother started using. I didn't mind it at first, but then I started spending less and less time with my mother. She started spending the money for our food on drugs and alcohol. We got kicked out of six houses. It didn't feel like my mother loved me as much anymore. Some nights I could hear my mother fighting with her boyfriends, and I could hear her crying. There was nothing I could do to help her. It was very frustrating for me.

But I always had faith in my mom. My family has been through a lot, but my mom is sober now. She has lived in supportive housing for two years, and has the support of the staff. It took time for my mom to get me back, but she did it! I now live with my mom and brothers, and I too have the support of the community and the staff here. This makes me feel so great! I too am clean and sober, and feel like I can do anything in the world I choose to do. I can happily say my family is happier, and my life is more enjoyable now that we are together again.

How Having a Stable, Safe, and Affordable Place to Live Has Affected My Life | Shirley Jenkins, age 43

HAVING A STABLE PLACE TO LIVE has given me an inexhaustible supply of confidence within myself. I now have the enthusiasm to explore my dreams, challenges, and goals. Being established has brought me hope and meaning to a new life, as if impediments of growth have been removed and now a generous supply of nutrients have been given, and I can expect to grow. I am no longer intimidated by my fears. Instead, I apprehend my fears into captivity, and I let go of what makes me stop. Living in a firm place has shown me how to be self-sufficient and how to approach my responsibility with commitment. I am now engaged in my responsibility to do what is obligated of me.

I once used to think of myself as a balloon filled with carbon dioxide and could not rise, but now I am a new balloon filled with helium and immediately I go up. My life has expanded in an astounding way. I have encountered many dwelling places, but none with the presence of stability. Given the opportunity to live in a safe environment allows me to reconcile with reality. My life was once laminated with guilt, shame, and unachievement. I have experienced compressing under heat. Now I have inherited an imperishable amount of self-esteem. Residing in an affordable place has given me the privilege to become a budgeter, and I have discovered perspective in a way like never before, and have reclaimed my life. Living in a stable, safe, and affordable place has affected my life tremendously.

How Has Living in Safe, Stable, and Supportive Housing Affected My Life? | Danita Walker, age 29

WHEN I ADMITTED THAT I WAS AN ADDICT, the first thing I recognized was the desire to move out of the neighborhood that was so familiar to me. I could not remain clean living in an area where drugs and alcohol were readily available inside and outside of my home. I could not sit on my front porch to enjoy the blessing of another day without worrying about being an innocent bystander getting hurt in gang cross fire. Kids could not walk nor play safely without interference of outside forces. I wanted my daughter to live in a good neighborhood where the community bonded together for the well-being of their families. I wanted to be clean from drugs. What I needed was change.

I learned of supportive housing through friends in recovery who knew that I was serious about changing my life. My first impression occurred the very first day when I came to submit my application. I was greeted and accepted with love and kindness. The women residents and staff I met that day really welcomed me. Right then I knew that this was home. Our community sticks together when it comes to keeping our community drug free and free of chaos. Many of us have come from all walks of life, and maintaining a stable and safe place to live is of the highest importance. We enjoy days when the children ride their bikes in the front of our homes, and having the feeling of security that we don't have to watch our backs fearing someone will jump out and attack us.

We look out for each other. By us pulling together for the sake of our lives, we can live a little more peaceful today. We each have reached a point of freedom. A woman's self-esteem has been boosted. Some have returned to the work force and others are pursuing higher education. Living in a safe, stable, and supportive housing development has allowed many women to obtain gifts of recovery for themselves that were so



Jodi Reeb-Myers | **Three Keys** | 2000, mixed media on canvas, 60 x 40 in.

neglected due to their addiction. Women are able to pay affordable rent, take care of their children's needs, and provide for themselves. Our community is so wonderful. I can knock on my neighbor's door and be completely honest about my life and not feel shame. I am accepted for who I am and not in spite of it. Living in this community has afforded me the opportunity to come closer to my higher power. Not only do I receive support from the community in which I live, but also I have experienced helping children and their parents. I have a solid network of people who care about me and I care about them equally. For the first time, my daughter was able to attend day camp for the whole summer.

This program has allowed my daughter to obtain her babysitter's license through the Red Cross. She is now surrounded by other positive role models who really do care about her well-being. Having the support of my community and the environment in which we live is the starting point of my journey each and every day.



Sandra Menefee Taylor | **Vessel, House, Garment** | 2000, mixed media, 72 x 32 in.

My Affordable House | Heidi Fuhr, age 22

TO ME, AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS THE KEY to achieving autonomy as a parent, as a household, and as a person. Not only does affordable housing offer short-term financial relief, it also provides the opportunity to learn life skills and lessons that will be valuable long after I have achieved self-sufficiency.

For almost a year, I have lived in a supportive housing program that offers beautiful downtown apartments with subsidized rent to single mothers in college. Before I moved in, I was single and pregnant. My living situation alternated between questionable roommate arrangements and intolerable live-in boyfriend situations. I knew I had to have a household of my own by the time my baby came, but rent costs were so high. It would have been impossible to continue my education and spend quality time with my child if I was going to make ends meet. Luckily, by the time my son arrived, I'd found supportive housing and begun to

learn some of the inner mechanisms of a functional household. Some of the things I learned about running a household seem marginal, but they're absolutely essential. For instance, learning to cook for one adult and a baby is no small task; after several months of buying meals one at a time in microwaveable packages, or cooking batches of food that were doomed to rot in Tupperware, I began to learn how to spread my food dollar further. Another indispensable skill I acquired was cleanliness; when my son learned to crawl, I quickly realized the merits of a good vacuum cleaner. As the only adult in my household, I also had to teach myself indispensable skills like budgeting (or at least the persuasiveness to talk creditors into an extension) and time-management (which sometimes means squeezing a few minutes of studying in while my son is enthralled with his Cookie Monster doll).

As I learn head-of-household lessons, I am also growing in more spiritual, less tangible ways. Before I moved into supportive housing, I was very dependent on men. Because of my financial need to share rent, I lived with boyfriends; because I lived with boyfriends, I began to get emotionally attached to the idea of having a man around to give me a false sense of self-worth. Now that I've had a functional household of my own for almost a year, and go about my daily routines with no male companionship but the smiles and laughter of my son, my self-esteem is steadily growing. Now that I don't need a man, I can wait to find a relationship that I really want.

Affordable housing has given me freedom. Since I don't have to work full-time, I have the physical and emotional energy to spend quality time with my son and to go to school full-time. My nine-month-old son is healthy and happy and loves me to pieces, and I am just four short semesters away from receiving a bachelor's degree in writing. Without affordable housing, none of this would have been possible.

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The Family Housing Fund would like to thank and acknowledge the following people for their outstanding efforts in helping the Fund celebrate our 20th anniversary and develop “Home Sweet Home: An Affordable Housing Art Exhibit.”

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