

Sometimes it takes a village to make a home: young authors



By Brock Weir

12 months might not sound like a long time, but if you're a new Canadian, a lot can be packed into that senior year. Recently, Brooke and Keira Elliott, their mom Jill Donohue and several members of their local neighbourhood, made a short trip to a nearby apartment bringing with them a cake and plenty of smiles. It had been a year since Aurora's Heritage Conservation District came together to help Nancy, an integral part of their community, welcome her children to their new home. She wasn't bringing home newborns but, as a skilled worker from the Philippines, she was finally able to bring her two children to Canada after nearly a decade's separation. 'Nancy had been with us for many years and away from her own kids for almost 10,' says Ms. Donohue. 'She has looked after us and helped us, and every year she would go back and visit her family and it always broke my heart. She left her kids when they were one and four and I just couldn't imagine doing that. What she had to go through versus the blessings we have living here! When she finally got permission from the Government to go home and get her kids, there was an apartment available in our neighbourhood, she rented it, and said to me, 'Our mattresses are going to arrive after I'm gone. Could you let them in?' I said, 'Sure,' but in my mind I thought, 'They are not going to come home to just mattresses. We can do more than that.' That thought quickly turned into action and the story of how a simple email sent through the network of the close-knit community is detailed by daughters Brooke and Keira in the newly published *Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Spirit of Canada*. 'Mom came to us and said, 'What if we set up Nancy's whole apartment,' says Keira. 'At first we were like, 'What? How are we going to do all that?' Soon, I don't know how mom did it, but there were tonnes and tonnes and tonnes of new furniture at our front door and I think it all fit perfectly into their new spot.' How mom did it was through a simple email. For many residents of the Heritage Conservation District, Nancy was a familiar face. Although she started working in Canada for Brooke, Keira and their parents, her services were needed less and less as the girls grew and spent more time in school. Industrious, Nancy began taking part-time jobs with the neighbours doing everything from helping with kids to the doing of laundry. 'People knew her and when I sent out the email I just mentioned that after 10 years Nancy is finally going to be able to bring her kids here but, because we are born here in abundance, we couldn't imagine not being here with our children,' says Jill suggesting they pool their resources to surprise her. 'Everyone was like, 'Oh, my gosh!' It was just an email out to the 70 ladies on the neighbourhood mailing list and they all eagerly said, 'Absolutely!' Everyone has something extra that is going to go on the curb, or that they are going to put on Kijiji, and there was even a brand new TV.' Those who didn't have any particular items to donate were all excited to offer their services. Some reached out to local schools to secure books for the children now in their tweens and teens in the languages of home, others collected clothes so they would be welcomed to Canada with full closets, and others offered their design expertise, whipping out pads of graph paper to make sure that everything they collected fit perfectly into Nancy's new digs.

?It was all perfect!? says Keira. ?Everybody had their designated job and it was like this whole neighbourhood was meant for that job.?

Soon enough, their efforts were greeted by the newly reunited family of three who were clearly overwhelmed by the community effort.

?Nancy could hardly stand up,? says Jill. ?She couldn't believe what happened and was so overwhelmed.?

Now, the community efforts continue.

Authors published in Chicken Soup for the Soul have the opportunity to take advantage of a program where they can obtain quantities of the books at discounted rates, which can then be sold to benefit local charities. The Elliotts and Ms. Donohue continue to pay it forward and are selling copies of the new book at \$20 per copy (two for \$30, and so on incrementally) to benefit Yellow Brick House.

?Nancy and I hope that by sharing this story we can inspire someone else to do something,? says Jill. ?I think we should do a house every spring and it is our hope this story will inspire others to reach out and help.?