

After tragic fire

Good friends give woman renewed hope and new home

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After losing everything in a house fire last May, Denise Campbell's faith and hope in life were renewed with overwhelming help from neighbors and a local home improvement company.

Campbell also lost her husband, who died of cardiac arrest, and two dogs as a result of the May 20 fire.

Her basement was gutted, while the remainder of the Belvedere Crescent house sustained severe smoke damage.

"The damage to the house was incredible," said Campbell, a nursing assistant and retired ordained minister who was forced to stay in a hotel after the fire.

"Within 24 hours the neighbors got together and sent me clothes, sent me money. I literally had nothing. They just rallied around. The love was incredible. It was overwhelming."

While Campbell lived in an Oakville house courtesy of a former patient's daughter, Ashbee Home Improvement transformed her own home.

Better than before

"I wondered if I'd ever be able to come back," she said. "But these people really made it a ministry. They restored it beautifully even better than it was before."

Brian Ashbee and his two employees worked six days a week for four months renovating the badly damaged house.

"The house is just a totally different house," Campbell said.

Ashbee diligently changed the look of the interior entirely so the home wouldn't be a constant reminder of the tragedy.

"He literally went out of his way to do what ever he could. It wasn't just putting a house back together...his heart was in it."

People ask her if she is going to sell the house now — the renovations were completed this month — but Campbell said people know to find her here and this is where she feels safe.

"How can I leave these wonderful neighbors?," she asked. "Out of tragedy there is triumph. My deep gratitude is for these neighbors of mine and to Brian Ashbee and his co-workers."

Kathy and Mike Jansen and Lucy and Frank Barry, neighbors on either side of Campbell, were a great help lending their electricity and water, taking messages and the like. Neighbors Mary Madryga and Patti Chisolm were instrumental in organizing fruit baskets, clothing and cards. And the neighbor three doors away, George Brown, was the person who dragged Campbell out of her burning home to safety. It is these people who have made it possible for Campbell to start living once again and for that she is eternally thankful.

This Christmas, although quiet, was a time of reminiscing, being thankful and of healing for Campbell.



Staff photo by Fred Loek
Denise Campbell sits in her beautifully renovated kitchen as she reflects on her good fortune to have such caring neighbors and friends. After her home was gutted by fire in May, and her husband died of a heart attack as a result, neighbors helped her piece her life back together while at the same time contractor Brian Ashbee was putting the house back together even better than before.