

The House That Lets Built

Well it all seems rather a long time ago now – my three children and I moved into the house in 1994, and hopefully by now there are quite a few other houses that have been constructed substantially through the LETS system.

At the time it was simply a matter of necessity. My assets were a small bush block, \$15000 and a very strong community. Bega Valley LETS was burgeoning and I was an occasional participant. I have to thank the enthusiasm and encouragement of my neighbours in the Brogo district as this played a big part in my decision to launch into the process. A definite factor was that some of these people were experienced builders. I decided on mudbrick to minimize the cost of materials. One memorable event was the Workshop held on the day that the first bricks were to be laid. Brendan Dwyer, a local bricklayer, was about to move away from the district, so all the willing workers (about 20 I recall) were there to learn as much as we could from him before he left. I remember him saying in answer to a question about when it was time to put in a brick tie, “Whenever a plane flies over.” Mind you, he had done his apprenticeship in Melbourne. Anyhow Brendan remained a constant mentor, even in absence, and we would redo a section if we thought it wasn't up to the standard he had set.

Here was a regular crew of half a dozen with a dozen more who came for the odd day here or there. The benefits were enormous: camaraderie, support with decision making and so much experience, skill, care and imagination. Quite a few of the workers were people who were new to the area and who were planning to build houses in the future and saw this project as an opportunity to learn as well a chance to get to know the local community.

We moved in after only three months, once the main roof was on, but building continued for another year or so.

Looking back at all my old accounts, I see that 26000 sapphires (the LETS units of Bega Valley) were paid to people who helped on the house. I began paying it off while the house was being built, and now still have just under 2000 sapphires left to repay. Another year should do it.

I am extremely happy in my house. Every wall, every door, every window tells a story, and is rich with the personalities of people who became my friends. The freedom from financial debt has been a real liberation, and the need to pay back my LETS debt has challenged me to take on tasks that I may not otherwise have tried. In the process, among many other things, I have gardened, cleaned, laboured, minded children, baked, tutored, organized a wedding and sold two cars. My extended family has helped by offering holiday accommodation, and once they got older my children have helped by working for sapphires as well.

Because I felt strong commitment to the area I was never worried about how long it would take me to repay. Local LETS members have told me that one person being willing to go heavily into debt gave a kick along to the system as so many people then had sapphires to spend. Last year I was finally overtaken as the biggest spender in the Bega Valley LETS.

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