

# One person can make a difference

Acton's Yvonne Marcil is keeping a promise she made three years ago to orphans in a small, remote Zambia village. She, and five volunteers, will be back this summer to build a school, and to help the community learn how to thrive and become self-sufficient.

In 2008, Marcil volunteered with Habitat for Humanity to build a house in Palabana, a rural Zambian village of approximately 2,500, about an hour from the capital of Lusaka. She, and another Habitat volunteer, were "horrified" by the tiny mud hut where a retired headmaster held classes for the orphans, and they vowed to return and build a school.

Marcil, 44, said the original plan has expanded

to include building two houses for teachers, and eventually, a boarding house for rural students. "The people in the village are just embracing this, and they are going to help us build the school. The Zambian government said as soon as the school was built, it would pay for the teachers, as long as housing was provided," Marcil said on Saturday.

Using supplies they will buy locally with donations to what Marcil calls the SNOWFLAKES for Zambia project, the volunteers and villagers will work together to build the school from July 2 to 16. While the government provides a Grade nine education to all, many of the orphans can't afford the required school books, supplies, uniforms and shoes. Marcil uses the

name SNOWFLAKES for Zambia because "even a snowflake never started out thinking it could become an avalanche."

Marcil, a former operations manager who has lived in Acton for nine years, said the first time she stepped on African soil, she felt she was home, and being downsized from her job allowed her to "follow my heart and passion."

Last year, Marcil spent three months in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, mainly working on AIDS projects – a very different Africa than she'd seen in her earlier stay in Palabana.

"I'm from Acton, I'm not a city girl, and Nairobi is a big city the size of Toronto with the population of Canada. What I experienced was not what you'd see on TV where Brad and Angelina go and its tin shanties and all that," Marcil said.

"I spent three months among those tin shanties, and what TV does not show is really what the environment is like – the filth, stench, the muddy water, the garbage, the human waste – they are just totally surrounded and living in that," Marcil said.

Marcil's way to help was to start a weekly group meeting for women who were eager for information on nutrition, first aid, family planning and AIDS. What she didn't know, she



**ZAMBIA BOUND:** Acton's Yvonne Marcil, with one of the many friends she made in Africa, is returning to Zambia this month to keep a promise she made three years ago to help build a school in the village. – Submitted photo

researched at a local Internet café.

While that trip was fulfilling, Marcil said this one is more exciting because it is their's. "It's us. It is kind of proof that even if you are just one person, you can make a difference. This is very meaningful. We vowed three years ago that we were going to come back and build a school, and it's actually happening," Marcil said.

On her way home, Marcil

will go back to the Nairobi slum to see her friends. Asked how she shakes off the Third World when coming home to Acton, Marcil said it's a balance.

"You shake a little off, but I never want to shake it totally off because what it proves to me when I come home, is just how lucky I am to have been born in Canada and live in a town like Acton...I still have a roof over my head and

food on the table" she said, realizing that it is like an awakening.

Marcil leaves June 18 to prepare for the two-week build that begins July 2. She can be reached at [yvonnemarcil@symoatico.ca](mailto:yvonnemarcil@symoatico.ca)

Donations to the school project can be made through "For the Love of Children" at [www.canadahelps.org/givingpages/givingpage.aspx?gpl=6176](http://www.canadahelps.org/givingpages/givingpage.aspx?gpl=6176)

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