

## Two Inspectors, Two Mentors... Stories from the Women of ASHI

Inspection News and Views  
from the American Society of  
Home Inspectors

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I earned my "handy skills" on my folks' horse farm in Illinois. I'd open up a machine to figure out how it worked and what I needed to do to get it running again. I've been elbow deep in everything from washing machines, manure spreaders and air conditioners to everything in between. When I was considering becoming a home inspector, Eric Barker from the ASHI Great Lakes Chapter told me to reach out to a man in my area "with an encyclopedic knowledge of homes," Lon Grossman. I called Lon to see if I could do a ride-along and he said, "Sure. Be here tomorrow at 8 am." Throughout that day, I saw Lon's passion for home inspection and at the end of the day, I asked, "Can we do this again tomorrow?" Lon agreed and I shadowed him for several months. I'd show up, carry the tools and learn everything I could, often typing up my notes at night so I could further cement the information into my brain.

Lon taught me to look at a house in the same way I looked at a machine—except with a home, the parts don't move. This concept made a lot of sense to me and it informs the way I continue to approach home inspection. Eventually, Lon invited me to work with him, so I got my license, became an ASHI member and an ASHI Certified Inspector, passed the Michigan State Builders exam, had business cards printed and—bam—I was a home inspector.

I'd had no problem fixing and explaining tools, equipment and machinery, but to be a home inspector, I had to expand my knowledge of houses so I could explain details with confidence. In fixing equipment, I didn't need to explain my thought process or reasoning to anyone—I could just identify the problem and fix it. Lon had to teach me how all the components of a house work and how they were designed to work together, as well as how to confidently and fully explain potential issues to clients. In the beginning, gaining the confidence to explain what I was seeing was the hardest part. I've had clients who, upon learning I was a woman, were skeptical or concerned about the quality of the inspection I would provide them, some outright voicing that to me.

Lon told me that there will always be people who will question my skills, but that I should remain confident that I'm good at my job, so just do my job and those people will change their tune. Early on, I scheduled a solo inspection for the daughter of a well-known local builder. When I learned that the builder would be attending the inspection with his daughter, I was nervous, but Lon told me, "Just do what you do and you'll be fine." At the end of the inspection, the builder said, "I don't have much need for a home inspector, but give me some of your business cards. You're quite good, and I'll tell my friends to call you." It was validating experience that boosted my confidence.

My clients put a lot of trust in me and I take that seriously. I feel lucky to have a job that allows me to look out for somebody else in what is most likely the largest purchase they have ever made. If a client asks me, "Should I buy it?" I explain exactly what they should know about the home, what they'll have to fix and when, and what issues are normal and not normal for a house of a certain age. At a certain point, a house can just become a math problem in terms of costs of repairs, what it's worth and so on. "Everything can be fixed, it's just money"—to buy or not to buy is entirely up to a client.



I feel that my brain and my senses are my best tools. I listen to the house, feel the boards under my feet, smell the house for mold, see the loose tiles or roof shingles. I try to continue to observe things around me when answering clients' questions so I don't waste an opportunity to notice what's going on inside or outside the house.

My "party trick" is my photographic memory of houses I've inspected. If someone shows me a photo or a street view, I can rattle off details about the house, even if I did the inspection years ago. Sometimes this skill is useful when I get a call from a client with a question from an inspection I did in the past.

My advice is to never stop educating yourself, even when you've hit your stride. There's always more to learn. Lon taught me that "education is expensive, but not being educated is even more expensive." As a home inspector, you serve as an unbiased third party. Give clients your time and expertise, not your opinion. The things you see—or don't see—can affect someone's quality of life