

I've been sick for a long time, but how did I also get broke and homeless? It's remarkably easy in the world's wealthiest country! Follow along, in eleven easy steps:

1) First of all, I didn't have a whole lot of cushion before this year. For years, I've been barely getting by on free lance writing and (usually temporary) activism or political jobs. My chronic health issues - I've had a double organ transplant and have also gone through a stroke, cancer, and various other complications - gutted my savings a long time ago. Next week will be the 20th anniversary of my transplants, as well as the ensuing immunosuppression. I'm hugely grateful for having survived far longer than anyone expected 20 years ago. But, I've been living on the margins for most of that time, a combination of my own choices (to prioritize working for a better world) and the priorities of the flawed world we live in.

2) Let's start this story with my decision in May of this year to move out from my 20-year relationship with Gavin. That was a hugely positive relationship for a very long time, and she'll always have a place in my heart. But we've also struggled for most of that time with a central relationship issue that finally hit what I believe was an insoluble dead end this spring. Between that and the increasing stress in our relationship, I realized this spring that these were affecting both my health and my ability to find work, and had no prospect of improving. And so, I took an emotional and financial risk and moved out. Emotionally, it was the right thing to do and I have sadness about it but no regrets. Financially, though, it was a disaster.

3) Our separation coincided with an insane explosion in Seattle rent prices. It took a month for me to even find an affordable room to rent for the summer. The three-bedroom house Gavin and I shared costs about the same as an average studio apartment now costs in Seattle - it was a shock.

4) By the time I found a place for the summer, I had only six weeks (until the end of August) to find a more permanent place. My friend Revel Smith and I decided to join forces, since her lease expired at the same time. We both needed a roommate to be able to afford Seattle housing, and we both have lived for a long time with a serious chronic health challenge (hers is multiple sclerosis). It seemed to make sense for us to both room together and be health support for each other. I found a reasonably nice and affordable place in the University District. It turned out she couldn't live there, because she had some sort of chemical reaction to something in the apartment. (Cue ominous music.)

5) At the same time, I was getting sicker, and we discovered that I also was, after the stress and couch-surfing of the summer, suffering from dangerously high blood pressure. By the time I got that under control I was also dealing with a dental emergency - I finally got a tooth pulled and immediately started feeling a lot better. Best guess is that I was suffering from an infection (via the tooth) that was doing a number on my health for two months. Welcome to America, where dental care isn't considered health care. I've still got a lot of dental work pending that I cannot even remotely contemplate affording - \$7,200 was the estimate two years ago.

6) While dealing with the tooth and the elevated blood pressure, it also emerged that my transplanted kidney was in trouble. A biopsy in September showed that about a third of my non-native kidney was permanently damaged, with scarring in progress on another sixth. I also had some sort of liver blockage. A surgery to remove the liver blockage in September cleared the way for a steroid treatment to attack a suspected kidney infection - but at that point my kidney function suddenly got better. It was probably a function of the tooth infection, not an infection of the kidney, but the long-term kidney damage is still real and worrisome. Usually, you'd expect my non-native pancreas to have problems first, but (knock wood) it's doing great. The kidney prognosis is still unclear, though. I expect that in 2015 there's a good chance I'll be added to a transplant list for another kidney, to replace the one that's done so well for so long.

7) My illness made it clear that the University District apartment wasn't going to work - not only did I need a roommate, but with the alarming kidney news, it wasn't accessible enough once my illness worsened. (No elevator and three flights of stairs up from the parking garage.) Also, as we went through our health things this summer, Revel and I became romantically involved, and got engaged this fall - our relationship has been the one incredibly positive thing about 2014! Without it I'm not sure how either of us would have gotten through the year. But this meant we were that much more motivated, for emotional as well as pragmatic reasons, to live together.

8) So, Revel and I signed a lease for a new place on Capitol Hill, a place that ought to have been fine for her chemical sensitivities as she actually lived in the exact same building years ago. But it meant I was on the hook for two different leases.

9) And...Revel lasted about eight hours in the Capitol Hill apartment before having a reaction that nearly sent her to the emergency room. It took four months to find someone to take over the University District lease (they move in next week), and meantime I've had to pay rent on two places that Revel couldn't stay in. She also had other health problems - beyond the new multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) and MS, she's had a persistent plantar fasciitis in her foot that has made walking very difficult throughout this drama. The upshot is that she's exhausted her savings on finding safe places to sleep, and we've decided with all the health issues that it makes more sense for me to sleep where she is than in the Capitol Hill apartment that's fine for me but toxic for her.

10) My November fund appeal helped a lot...and then Revel's health got worse. With all the stress she's getting a flare of her MS symptoms that will require five days of (fairly difficult) IV steroid treatments next week, as well as a safe place for her to stay while she goes through that. We've now got that covered (probably), but in the meantime I have no idea where we can stay either this weekend or over the holidays as she recovers from the treatment.

11) To add injury to multiple insults, while parked in a parking lot we got rear-ended by someone backing out of their parking space Wednesday night. I'm OK and the car's OK (though I live in fear that it'll break down at any time - it's 18 years old). But Revel also hurt her back in the accident..

See? Eleven easy steps.

To give you an idea of what my days have been like of late, beyond sending this out my tasks today include: figuring out where we'll stay tonight; a physical therapy appointment for me, and two appointments for Revel, one to check her back and another for the MS symptoms (with the bad foot, she's relying on me for transportation); getting things out of storage for documentation for a Medicaid application and to try to sell some books for cash; selling a synthesizer for cash (same reason); the city council campaign job; and prepping for Saturday morning's KEXP show. Plus whatever other miscellaneous tasks of daily living come up. Honestly, from a health standpoint I really need to just sleep all day. But that's not an option.

This is what my days have been like, every day, for months, as we try to deal with these challenges and find longer term solutions. It's also why I haven't had nearly enough time for social contact. I've missed so many of you! I'm really, really hoping that better health, stable housing, and improved cash flow (including your response to this) will help me change that in 2015. Thanks for whatever you can do to help!