

Joe and Sea's Story

When Things Knock You off Track... You Need a Place to Go

Joe and Sea are living testimony to the resilience of the human spirit. They have been tested again and again and have shown that they have the fortitude to stand whatever life throws their way and then pick themselves up and move on.

Fifteen years ago, they were on the course they had charted for themselves. Sea had a degree in computer science and an established career in software development. The couple lived and worked in Cambridge MA.



Then the unexpected happened. Sea got sick. Though she is determined and thought she could push through as always, the illness worsened until it became impossible to continue work and, consequently, to pay rent. They moved out of Cambridge and eventually on to Northampton, to live with Joe's mother.

Sea's illness required a lot of the couple's attention and resources and then they were dealt another blow. Joe's mom was diagnosed with cancer. At that point Joe was trying to manage whatever work he could along with caring for Sea, who had essentially become housebound, and his mother. It all made Joe realize he needed to try to get back to school to earn a degree that would lead to a better paying job. Just when it seemed things couldn't get worse, the couple had to leave the apartment they had finally moved into because the new owners raised the rent and didn't want to continue the "sweetheart deal" Joe and Sea had had with the previous owner – some repair work and maintenance in return for affordable rent

"We were holding on by our fingernails," Joe says in describing these years of struggle and sometimes feelings of despair. "Good thing we have strong fingernails and strong faith." And now, they are on the path to becoming first-time homeowners. Joe sums up what home means to people like him and Sea and so many others who find themselves in a place they never thought they'd be: "Things knock you off track and when that happens, you need a place to go."

For this couple who lost so many of their social connections due to Sea's physical limitations and confinement to their inadequate (not handicapped accessible) housing, taking part in Habitat's community build process is opening up new avenues for them. Sea has been poring over manuals and becoming the expert on the systems in their future energy-efficient home, baking for the volunteer work crews, and lending her graphics skills to some Habitat marketing materials. Joe is loving working out on the construction site and has started to imagine having a yard where he and Sea and their dog Artie ("the love of our lives") can be outside together at last and he is starting to imagine maybe going back to finish his degree. "So much has changed since we started building our house," says Joe. "I am actually asking myself, 'what would I want to do with a future?'"

