

Annie and her husband, Joseph, live in a rented trailer in Boyd County, Kentucky. They haven't had a working kitchen sink in 7 months. Joseph undid the pipes from the wall to be able to fill up plastic tubs to do their washing and dishes in, but recently the gravity-fed pipes have become so clogged with debris that the patch job they devised is no longer working. Annie is a stroke patient, and getting the tubs of water full and moved for washing was difficult with the original fix – now it is almost impossible for her. Their septic tank has not been serviced in four years, and a friend told the couple he thinks the sewage is beginning to back up into the trailer, causing the plumbing to fail all around. They tried to get a plumber out to see if he could fix the water issue at least, but the underpinning on the trailer was padlocked, and the landlord ignored requests for a key. There's a mouse infestation in the trailer too, made worse by the recent winter. The tubs they use for washing serve as double-duty storage for dry goods to keep the rodents out of crackers and cereals, and they frequently use paper plates and plastic cutlery because it's easier to keep things clean when the dishes are disposable.

Annie and Joseph pay their \$750 a month rent monthly. Joseph drives to Huntington every day for work, but Annie's health has recently become so poor that she is unable to stay employed. She has an enlarged spleen that makes it almost impossible for her to eat, and the pain keeps her awake at night. She has Medicaid and has been to see doctors, but can't get anyone to coordinate her care, leaving loose ends, practitioners and specialists who aren't communicating, and visits that don't pair up. "The doctors will see me one by one, but that's all that happens. It just stops after the appointments and there's never follow-up. They aren't talking to each other.", Annie says. She tried to get an official leave of absence from her work so she'd be able to return one day, but her doctor never mailed in the paperwork, and her request was denied. She's currently trying to appeal that decision. Annie has an appointment with an internist at The University of Kentucky later this spring where she hopes to get some answers and coordinated treatment in an attempt to return to work. In the meantime, they try to stay on top of their rent and utility bills using just her husband's income.

The couple's trailer is owned and rented to them by the best friend of Joseph's ex-girlfriend. Joseph and the ex were living together when they split up, and Joseph remained in the residence. Since then, the landlord has harassed him without provocation. She refuses to add Annie to the lease, making it difficult for the couple to file for Section 8 funds, SNAP benefits, or low-income housing. The pair cannot, on the single income they budget with, afford to move anywhere else. They have no lease, so the landlord is under no obligation to fix the plumbing, sewage, and rodent issues, and has repeatedly refused to do so. For now, Annie says, it is "just barely better than being homeless", and recognizes things would be harder for them living in a car or on the street. The landlord refuses to discuss anything with Annie because she isn't on the lease; Joseph is unable to talk to her because all that comes up is his breakup with the landlord's friend, Joseph's previous domestic partner. They have contacted legal aid, but the staff there says that until an eviction is filed, there's nothing they can help the couple with. Even if they could afford it, the couple is afraid to just move out, worried that the landlord will sue them for damages in the trailer, despite those being issues that would be her responsibility were a lease in place.

At the time of this interview, Annie was hopeful that the landlord would send a positive letter of reference to help the couple get approved for a new apartment. A myriad of issues followed, though, including difficulties getting the required birth certificate and social security card for Annie out of her birth place of New York state, and the landlord sending not only no letter, but a wounding one, raising concern with the owners of the housing complex they had been looking forward to moving to. The backlog of Section 8 housing is years and years long – very few units are available. One negative comment or letter can be seen as a good reason to take someone off of the list – there are plenty more people waiting in line to be accepted. "All we want is a fresh start where we can live clean and afford our bills and I can get better. Nothing works out though and we're here just stuck with nowhere to go. It's like there are no laws to protect us or even help us. We're stuck here."