

# Ready to put down roots in Western Mass



Little did Jem know that some of the soft skills she's picked up through life would come in handy when she found herself building her future home. With a father and stepfather who are both pretty handy, Jem during her younger years was around people who knew how to use tools to get things done and who passed along some woodworking skills. Although computer programming was her focus at her technical high school, Jem was required to rotate through various areas of study in order to determine and confirm her path. Her exploratory classes included carpentry and electrical studies, giving her some basic knowledge in and comfort with the trades.

Jem's entry into the Habitat community-build process was a trial by fire...or more accurately by ice. Due to a later-than-typical start in the year on the construction of the home that will one day be Jem's, her first weeks on the job were characterized by snow, ice and extreme cold. Her work on the site has included, to date, building the attached shed and clearing snow off scaffolding in order for the day's work to begin. She says of the volunteers alongside whom she has worked, "everyone has been great, it's cool how happy they are to work on this, how much they care about it."

Since coming from eastern Massachusetts to go to school in Amherst, Jem says she has been "deliberately building a community with a varied group of friends" and feels ready to put down roots in the western part of the state. She looks forward to having her own space, says she knows she'll be here a long while and likes the thought of being settled. No more landlords dictating the terms, no more years of multiple moves. There's the house she will have helped build herself, of course, and Jem also plans to have a garden and check out the nearby woods in which her future home will be nestled. "I got lucky, I guess!" she says of having been selected in Pioneer Valley Habitat's homeownership lottery selection process