



His and Her Unemployment

*When my husband got the ax, he stayed busy.
When my turn came, I took a different approach.* **BY LIZA CARENS SALERNO**

Eight years ago, my husband lost his job. The regional retailer that had employed him for 17 years succumbed to the competition of national big-box chains and expired, offering up a pink slip instead of a bonus the week before Christmas.

I still had my job, and since my contribution to the family bank account was not insignificant, we rewrote our budget and managed. After taking planned time off over the holidays, my husband plunged right into a job search, spending hours in front of the computer, reviewing job websites, following up on all leads. When not networking, sending resumes, or arranging interviews, he kept himself busy around the house. Had it not been for the missing paycheck, it would have been a wonderful time. Our then 7-year-old daughter, a day-care girl from day one, came home after school rather than staying late. My husband ferried her to activities and appointments, picking her up from Girl Scout meetings and taking her to the dentist.

While she was in class, he completed the projects around the house that had drifted to the bottom of the to-do list, installing closet organizers and mounting paneling in the garage over 50-year-old insulation. He cleaned cupboard doors and painted

trim. I know that his unemployment status bothered him, but he never complained, kept his head down, and at the end of six months was rewarded with a job offer. It was 60 miles from home, in another state, but it was a job, and given that his industry has been disappearing from the Massachusetts landscape, it seemed prudent to take it. Knock on wood, he's still there.

For most of the time he was with his previous employer, and for the seven years that he's been with his current, I was employed by a local company. That is, until last month, when the economy struck a lethal blow and I was informed on a Wednesday that there would be no Thursday for me.

As we had the last time, we analyzed the family finances, put ourselves on a budget, and as a result of a generous severance package, we are managing. What is different, though, is how I am approaching the job search. My husband got right down to it. He knew he needed a job; he took

his responsibility seriously and worked at finding a position comparable to his previous situation. When he wasn't seeking a new means to provide a paycheck, he accomplished things at home.

Though I'm working at the job search, I'm kicking and screaming all the way. With our daughter's college education looming in our none-too-distant future, it's clear I need to bring in an income. Yet the idea of returning to the career that has helped support us for so many years makes my stomach churn. Instead of embracing all that I've accomplished and rushing out there with a resume, I've spent weeks trying to determine what I want to do next. I've started a blog, sharing my thoughts on sudden unemployment, and, yes, the finished resume is getting closer. But in between, I'm sorry to say, there is not much getting done around the house. Instead, I've been out with my working-in-the-home or part-time employed friends. When the pocketbook allows, there have been lunches, but most times, it's walking, for miles at a stretch, combined with hours of thoughtful conversations analyzing our current situations in life. I, too, am happily chauffeuring our daughter.

These days, though, she's a busy but nonlicensed teenager; she still needs me, but if not in school, she welcomes alone time while I traipse seaside neighborhoods inhaling the salt-laden air.

Then I get home and force myself to do something related to a job search. So while my husband had concrete accomplishments to point to during his time off, I have less tangible things—heartfelt dialogues reflected in stronger calves.

Yet, just as I stood by my husband eight years ago while he pursued his disrupted career, he supports me as I reconfigure mine. For better or worse, richer or—these days, unfortunately—a lot poorer, no matter how he and I individually manage unemployment, we are in it together. That's peace of mind that doesn't come along with direct deposit.

So while I know I'll get my act in gear soon, I'm grateful for his patience. The bad news is that the porch railing is peeling, and I'm not sure how long I'm going to get away with not painting it.

Liza Carens Salerno lives, walks, and, with any luck, will work again soon on the South Shore. Send comments to coupling@globe.com.



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