

Letting Go

By Linda Herrera

I wasn't ready for it. Not yet. Some people are excited to stop working or retire. But few want to be laid off like my entire team and I were in October, 2019. There are a few things I do well. One of them is taking care of my family. Another is working.

I submitted resumes for 160 jobs and had Zoom interviews for **months**. Then Covid literally shut down my industry and the world in March, 2020. It was especially brutal for those over 80, like my mom. Fear rattled me to my core. How would I see her or keep her safe? Would my son, who works in the medical profession, be safe? What about my grandson? Would I have enough money to pay bills?

I was too proud to apply for unemployment at first. It meant surrendering. It meant that I had no control. But finally I did it. After weeks of waiting and spending hours on hold, I was approved. What a relief.

Since older people were supposed to be isolated at the beginning, I would visit my mom briefly several times a week and frantically run in with groceries that I'd washed and disinfected, then run out with her garbage and recycling. It was my sneaky way of physically making sure she was alright. At night we would sing, laugh, and gossip on FaceTime. When I could stay longer, we played board games, watched afternoon TV, danced, and decorated gingerbread houses. Then my son caught the virus. I shopped and cooked for his family. I'd leave food and my grandson's homework that I picked up from his school on their doorstep every day, until he recovered and returned to work.

Through those surreal and stressful months, I found great love, kindness, and angels in many places. My sister-in-law sent me masks when I couldn't find any. A store employee would text me when essentials like wipes, hand sanitizer, toilet paper had arrived, and would hold them until I got there. Neighborhood girls painted rocks and put them in our front yards.

I found peace by not working and a new purpose helping my family and elderly neighbors. I saw life in a whole new way, walking miles, spending precious time with my son and grandson at the park. I wrote, meditated, read, painted, and finally, breathed.

One of my favorite quotes is, "Silence is a source of great strength." I gained both during the pandemic. With the loss of control of so many things, I found the strength that comes with surrender.