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Almost 3 months has past since I wrote last. Time has flown by, but on the other hand, it has dragged on and on because of winter. Howard is still looking for a job and the strain of it is wearing me down. He was laid off at the worst time of the year, just before the Christmas holidays, bad quarters for companies everywhere so interviews didn't pick up until after the first of the year.

He started out looking at medical companies only, but now has started to look at computer related companies –something he wants desperately to get out of. He's working with head hunters, half of whom are as useful as bow ties on a polo shirt. The other half doesn't know how to read a resume and sometimes How gets his resume forwarded to jobs he clearly should not try out for because they're looking for someone more junior. It's all very frustrating, to say the least. How, blessedly, trudges on getting dressed everyday as if he was going to work, working 24/7 on the laptop hunting for jobs. How does a man do that and stay sane? I'm always checking to see if he's okay, not dispirited (and he's not), while I'm the one falling apart. I know...it's the safety issue all over again.

Most of the jobs he applies for inform him that he is over qualified, which is code-speak for ageism. He's too valuable an employee and he's too expensive. This has been the fear we've talked about since the big layoff in '01. Hiring How given his experience and abilities, fully employed with benefits costs too much money so one is forced to work on contract as has been the lot of many engineers in his age group. Technically, How has been under-employed for seven years and that means we've been paying outrageous money monthly (to the tune of over \$15,000 per year) to maintain healthcare benefits.

How saw the movie "Sicko" and came out of the theater totally radicalized. He has managed to organize two forums for the Jewish community around universal healthcare. I can't believe it. Here I thought I was the political rabble-rouser and I come to find out I'm outdone. He's committed state senators and various "A" listed knowledgeable people on healthcare to participate in these forums. I have listened to him cajole on the phone with these "hotshots" and it's like water rolling off a duck's back to him. Very smooth. He has prepared press releases and printed material and he's organized two Jewish community centers to sponsor and publicize these events. It's a wonder watching him initiate and drive this project on his own. I'm just a bemused spectator standing on the sidelines.

As for me, I barely survived the winter. It was unusually long as even veteran Minnesotans can attest. I couldn't work in the studio because it was too cold even though we had a heater installed when we first moved in. My heart is just not in it, but I long to do large commissions again. Getting a network up and running in a strange new place is another complication or nut I haven't cracked yet. I did get contacted by a synagogue in Boston that burned down in January. I was Googled and my name came up, which was a big shock to me given the chances of even getting listed on the first two clicks, but at least that's one tickle.

I've been busy with sewing projects, cross stitching and other needlework. I finished writing a book and I've submitted it to a publisher. So far it has past the first hurdle for consideration. They warn me that it could be months before any editorial activity will happen. I continue to write a column for the local newspaper, but to tell you the truth, it's not much fun. When I started writing the column a friend warned me not to use big words so you can imagine the mental stimulation I get writing for this particular audience.

Another friend connected me with a couple of groups, one on senior transportation and the other –an Area Agency on Aging advisory council, which added to the two choirs I sing in, gets me out of the house. It involves a lot of driving however, which is the one continuing depressing part of living where we live. We could live closer to Minneapolis, but the prices of houses are like that of Santa Cruz, so what's the point? The trade-off is long distance driving for absolutely every activity we do outside of the house so naturally, I put off piling into the car to run errands. It just kills a whole day for me. My conscience always nags at me for wasting an entire day shopping for food and other supplies. I find I'm actually hiding in my house; it just takes too much energy to pile into the car.

Gas has managed to hover around \$3.75 in our town, although I know that throughout the US it is well over \$4. I hear it costs truck drivers nearly \$1000 to fill up their tanks. Can you imagine that?

Hwy. 12 which is the main artery west of Minneapolis we turn off from is full of construction projects in various stages of completion, some not until summer of '09. So guess what? Added to the mileage just to get into the city, we have numerous detours to navigate which backs up traffic during rush hour in both directions.

Passover came and went and I didn't do a thing to prepare for it. I was a Pesach pooper this year. We were invited to two Seders and the closer the dates came, the more depressed I got thinking about the energy it would require participating. I just didn't want to see anyone or engage so we didn't go and I didn't prepare the house. We did eat matzo for 8 days but that cancels out (doesn't it?) when I didn't even remove the chumitz (the bread/wheat products). I am amazed at myself because it was the first time in 35 years I didn't prepare for Passover. I suppose that's saying a lot. I'm sure I've outraged all of you folks from temple, but I just didn't care. Pesach is not the same without the kids and as they move along with their lives, I don't think we'll have Passovers like we used to.

This will be a short one because I don't have much else to say except that I wish this offering wasn't such a downer. The sun is just now peaking out of the clouds and my bulbs have started blooming. I'm sure once the employment issue is out of the way we can get on with our lives, but both of us can never relax on the notion of a steady job. Those days are gone apparently, and we'll be living our lives with the sword of Damocles over our heads until retirement, that is IF we can retire and return to California. Until next time...Love, Maria

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