

Peggy Nahas Foster, Bellingham, Wash. Kicked Out of Her Comfort Zone

Last December, I found myself standing in the unemployment line for the first time in my life. After 13 years of full-time employment, the lawyers I worked for dissolved their partnership, and I was laid off.

I felt lost. I'm not big on change. In fact, I loathe change.

I had no idea how to manage my time when not devoting every iota of mental capacity to working. And I had no idea how to be a stay-at-home mom. Although my tenure as a legal assistant had been draining and had squelched my creativity, it was a nice, safe routine, without challenge — and was, definitely, unchanging.

My husband, Dennis, and I had just reached that elusive income bracket known as “comfortable.” We had signed papers to buy our house a month earlier and had taken a sizable second mortgage to finish some much-needed renovations.

But without a job, I lost direction in my daily life. I became depressed and fretful. I struggled to recite the sutra every day and chanted simply for the sake of chanting — because it was routine, because it was normal. (I couldn't let every part of my life change!) I chanted to have life force, wisdom and victory, things I always chant for when I can't concentrate on other concerns or goals.

I was staying awake like an owl all night. My whole world seemed to be collapsing around me. “If you have time to worry, you have time to chant,” a young women's division leader once told me. Well, I was worrying all right. I was tormenting myself with feelings of inadequacy. I felt valueless.

Also, I have always told myself that no one will take me seriously because of my Rubenesque physique. This is how I imagined closed-door discussions would go after interviewing me for a position: “She's so lazy.” “Fat people can't even take care of their own bodies and health. Just imagine how ineffective an employee that fat girl would be!”

It was about a month later that I began pulling myself up out of the pit of despair and was able to discuss my situation with a women's division leader. She said that when she was feeling depressed, she called or visited members. I didn't feel like calling or visiting members. But I chanted for them to come to me. And they did! One former member, two longtime friends of the SGI-USA (my cousins!) and one friend all starting practicing with me at the beginning of the year.

It was during this “coming to the end of the dark, nasty tunnel” phase that I found myself itching to do something productive. The most amazing thing was happening: The “brain cramp” I had lived with for 13 years was relaxing, releasing a surge of creative juices...all over my house! I became quite manic about decorating. I attacked our house with a glue gun and paint. I had never realized that I was capable of creating decorative art, but suddenly, I had the time, energy and brain capacity to unleash my hidden talent on the world.

It reminded me of something SGI President Ikeda said in *Daily Guidance*, volume 2: “Remember that for one who chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, even in the midst of pitch-black anguish, the lotus blossom, the Law of the lotus that is the flower of supreme satisfaction, can be made to bloom and send forth its fragrance.”

Well, *I was blooming*. Twice every weekday I watched a home-improvement show called *Interior Motives* on the Discovery Channel. Watching those first episodes, I was filled with enthusiasm. I remember saying over and over: “I can do that. I can do that.” The motto of *Interior Motives* is “Where there is fear, there is no creativity.”

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I transformed our house from Spartan and utilitarian to an oasis of light, fabric and color. Day by day, as I transformed the house, I found that I was changing, too. For one thing, I was losing weight — partly because I was no longer snacking at my desk. I was yelling at my daughter a lot less, and Denny and I were getting along better than ever. My family *liked* having me at home.

But the state requires those who collect unemployment to look for work. Whenever I thought of looking for a job, my old feelings of inadequacy would jump right in.

Even so, I applied for one job and was called for an interview. I encountered an obstacle that I hadn't expected: stairs. The interview was held on the second floor of a building without elevators. Huff, puff. It was all I could do to not let the interviewers see my exhaustion after climbing 30 steps.

The panel asked me about my attitude toward working with children, which has been nurtured by active participation in the SGI-USA. Our organization is an incredible venue to learn how to deal with people of all ages and temperaments. My positive attitude and strong secretarial skills landed me the (dreaded) new job...as a substitute secretary and instructional assistant at a local school.

This was a big move for me. Well, because *I* had to move. All of my fears of being discriminated against because of my size proved unfounded. For example, I moved with purpose to take appropriate action when a student was injured by a basketball. I stopped fist fights, mediated minor disputes and gained the respect of the school administrators.

Recently, a long-term substitute secretarial job opened up. It needed to be filled by someone with strong secretarial skills, and the director of Special Education asked for me. ME!

I now climb about 60 steps four times a day — I'm grateful for the exercise, especially since a recent medical examination indicated that I'd better lose weight, and fast. Size acceptance will always be an issue I take a stance on, but not if I'm so unhealthy that I can't speak out. I am determined to keep losing weight. And without grumbling about it.

Since I lost my old job, my life has blossomed (right out of the mud, like a lotus flower) — even after losing a good salary and having to face challenges I never thought I was ready to handle.

Where there is fear, there is no creativity. Life force, wisdom and victory had always been at my fingertips...I just had to be kicked out of my comfort zone to realize it.

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