

A rolling perspective: Resistance is fertile

Jennifer Holland

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Jennifer Holland has been a regular contributor here at the CPD. She has moved on to pursue other writing interests. We have enjoyed her columns and wish her the all the best. This is a re-post of a favorite column she did for us in February 2019.

Imagine my shock when, on January 14th, I received a letter from Social Security informing me my February check would be a third less than normal. *What?!* I immediately called them. I waited on hold for two hours and twenty-one minutes before being told that due to a communications mix-up (a) they hadn't yet received the paperwork they wanted; (b) it would be at least forty-five days after receiving said paperwork for them to decide if they liked it or not; and (c) if they *did* like it, I'd get the money back. Eventually.

Hyperventilating and in tears, I asked how I was supposed to pay rent and bills? Silence from the other end; then: "Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"Um... no. Thanks." *For nothing!*

Distressed? You bet I was. The fear of being homeless raised its shaggy head. I could neither eat nor sleep in my cold apartment. (The broken thermostat won't be fixed until the government shutdown ends.)* I rechecked the paperwork; perfect. I contacted my case worker and the local Social Security office, who assured me my premiums would be covered. They also confirmed I'd get the money refunded. *But how does that help me NOW? How will I survive?*

I know we've all had life events that cause us to wonder what happened. We did everything "right," yet we're screwed. Ah. There's a clue: stuff like this happens to *everyone*. Expecting a resistance-free life is a fantasy. In fact, perhaps we *need* resistance in order to thrive? Hmm.

Because I was suffering, I knew an unexamined belief or two lurked nearby. I found one soon enough: *People on low fixed incomes should never have their income reduced without warning!* Maybe not, but the fact is, I was getting \$300 less. *This shouldn't happen!* Alas, darling, it has. Deal with it!

To shunt the Fear Train to another track, first I meditated. I reminded myself that stress is not an "outside" thing; it's part of human existence. An event cannot cause stress itself, and only my perception of it determines whether I suffer or rejoice. Finally, I drew from the Byron Katie method and came up with this:

- *Expecting broken systems to work when they don't is just NUTS.*
- *It's a wonderful opportunity for society to change how it treats its citizens, especially its poor, elderly, and disabled.*
- *I now have a fantastic opportunity to become financially independent using my writing talent.*
- *This will turn out to be a blessing. I know this from experience.*

Once I saw the silver linings, ideas for empowering actions presented themselves. You can't help but see the possibilities in front of you once the blinders of fear are removed.

I could build stamina so I could work longer periods at my keyboard. I resumed the exercises physical therapists had given me; gentle but powerful resistance ones designed to strengthen me for surgeries. Chair yoga was already in my routine, but I increased its frequency.

I read an inspiring study about weight lifting for seniors, how it was so successful that doctors are prescribing it. I found a diet that works *with* my gut biome instead of against it. I learned a transformative breathing exercise. A webinar guided me to make realistic goals.

These valuable tools were all *free* (be sure to check out the resources at the bottom of this post). Once I implemented them, my body—delighted I was listening to it—took over. What a blessing that Social Security letter was, to galvanize me into empowering actions on my own behalf! I still don't have the money, but I'm not worried. I know I'm equipped, mentally and physically, to accept

whatever solution shows up. And show up it will, now that I've overcome my resistance to reality.

The experience also sparked these "What ifs":

- *WHAT IF* we've got it backwards? *WHAT IF* the longer we work, the better off, physically and mentally, we are? (Not by working more hours in a day, but by working benefited jobs over a longer term.) In fact, how much healthier would our society be if the entire workforce went part-time?
- *WHAT IF*, instead of replacing older workers by young people with no experience, companies valued the wisdom and expertise of their older employees and kept them on?
- *WHAT IF* young people got to focus on learning a trade because they were financially supported? Give *them* the Social Security until they enter the workforce and can save for a future free of government assistance. And:
- *WHAT IF* job security and decent wages eliminated the stress-related illnesses that cause older employees to lose their jobs in the first place?

If they're going to charge us the regressive premium for Medicare's various and mandated parts, then BY GUM, give us the opportunity to earn enough to pay it! Don't penalize us; utilize us.

Here's another: *WHAT IF* all seniors and disabled persons were given free gym memberships, not just those whose pricey plan qualifies them for it? And instead of paying poor people to undergo drug trials, give them organic, plant-based diets; gym memberships; yoga instruction. Watch what happens when physical exercise, a healthful diet, and meditations are traded for medications. See how much stronger and vibrant the subjects are who come out of *that* kind of study!

While most of these What ifs are but a dream in the USA, we still have outlets for creative resistance. If you're in a wheelchair and live in Salt Lake or a neighboring county, you're in luck. Have you had a stroke? Heart attack? Spinal Cord Injury? LUCKY YOU. (Me, too.) You qualify to participate in programs offered by TRAILS and the National Ability Center. They offer any and every sport you can imagine—all adaptive. You'll receive phenomenal support from everyone, I promise. My involvement with TRAILS changed me from a depressed woman to one who greets every day with joy.

Perhaps, like I do now, you live in a rural area. No problem! Learn how to build your resilience right at home. Instead of expecting help from outside sources and being

disappointed when it's not there, change your perspective. See how your living situation allows you to do things others can't. Start where you are: it doesn't matter how fast or well you move, just keep moving. The benefits of movement show up quickly.

Maybe our society has it backwards, but we can resist its unquestioned belief that we are "less than" simply because of age or infirmity. We can get older *and* stronger. If they won't accept us in the workforce or give us a living wage, then let's use our garnered wisdom and honed talents to generate our own income. It's never, ever too late to live an inspired life.

Resistance is not futile, it's our friend. We can use it, along with equal parts of rest, to creatively meet whatever happens on our path. We've only got the one journey; why not move through it with as much grace and strength we can?

**At the time this post was written (January 2019), a government shutdown was in effect.*

Resources:

Read [this article](#) on weight-lifting for seniors—or at the very least, look at the picture they put with it.

[National Ability Center \(Salt Lake City\)](#)

[Common Ground \(Logan\)](#)

Jennifer Holland taught herself to read and write at age four and has been doing both ever since. Minnesota-born and Wisconsin-based, she nonetheless embraced the idea of travel. Despite the pinching budget, she visited a dozen countries before her disability, and even lived in Ireland for nearly fifteen years. Her encounters with other cultures inform the quirky insights into human behavior that find their expression in her poetry, novels, and non-fiction works. When she's not reading or writing, she enjoys chair yoga, video chats with her children and grandchildren, and living happily with MS on a tiny fixed income.

