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## Finding Balance in the Midst of the Great Recession in my Mother-in-Law's Closet

by *Christine Scioli* • *More.com Member* { [View Profile](#) }



Yesterday I hiked at a place called Abbott's Lagoon, way out on the tip of the Pacific Ocean. Here, nature created two magnificently calm lagoons, one salt water and one fresh water, just a few hundred feet from gigantic waves only the crazy seals could frolic in.

Volunteers had painstakingly prepared warning signs so that the endangered, snowy plover could peacefully nest in the wild dunes, while the sea gulls and pelicans were holding intricate Sunday services for thousands of their brethren. Here there was total balance and harmony, and we were lucky to be there, a small, silent minority of humans, allowed to take it all in. These splendid creatures did not know about the Great Recession of 2009.

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Last month on another glorious Sunday, I was exploring Amish Country, a short journey from the Philadelphia suburbs. It had been many years since I had ventured that way, and I was sure it would be harder than ever to find vestiges of those "simple" folks, who lived without electricity and cars, phones, TV and other distractions. I was wrong. The Amish population has increased 85% percent in the last 20 years. The main drag leading into the town of Lancaster is tackier than ever, with ugly strip centers galore, but take any side road, especially on Sunday, their day of rest, and within seconds one becomes a visitor to another world, their world. There were hundreds of buggies and sturdy, immaculately groomed horses carrying families, young adults and children, barefoot and in traditional garb—simple bonnets and straw hats. Where once they were quite hesitant to make contact with the "English" as they call us, now they would smile and wave occasionally. Actually, they were much too busy having fun, riding the winding roads between rolling, lush, green farms, sitting on their porches chatting and laughing, playing horseshoes on the lawn. Again, I felt a sense total balance, this time man and nature together, impervious to the Dow Jones, bailouts, buyouts, layoffs or most definitely "cash for clunkers."

Then there are the rest of us, coping with unprecedented down times, and, let's face it, no matter how you spin it, it's going to take a good long time to get things moving again. What do we do to find balance between panic and play, shopping and savings, joy and that nagging feeling of being burned out and bummed out? The majority of us won't find satisfaction in a bland cotton pinafore that falls about an inch below the knee, and we most certainly enjoy our modern day "stuff." I found my answer recently when my family had to move my mother-in-law into an assisted living facility.

Of course, she'd been a victim of the Great Depression, and of course, we all knew that, but we didn't realize the extent to which she never got over it. I found every gift we had ever given her in 30 years, vestiges of every trip we've ever taken, never used, tags still on. Practical gifts, too—bright oven mitts and kitchen towels from Hawaii, a nightgown from London and, to the absolute chagrin of my two daughters, the never used Louis Vuitton handbag we bought her for her 80th birthday, which was a HUGE big deal for all of us to buy for her—and a Chanel scarf that was to celebrate her 85th.

Not to mention a few decades worth me she loved.

All those lovely, very specific thank-yous couldn't let go and use **whatever**, u that day will never come.

So we ended up packing many of the bizarre version of re-gifting.

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