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Out-of-work couple falls back on natural skills

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Sarah Hilbig considers herself one lucky woman.

Last October, her husband Paul got laid off from his job at Kastera Homes. He had worked there for four years as director of land acquisitions, but the home-building firm went down with its parent company, DBSI, which filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in November.

Paul, 33, sent out hundreds of resumes throughout 20 states, according to his wife. He was told by some prospective employers to "take your education off your resume; you're overqualified."

He has a master's degree in real estate development from the University of Texas at Arlington. He is also, according to Sarah, "an entrepreneur at heart" and a man who has made dozens of inventions, including a Band Aid dispenser.

The past eight months have required the Hilbigs – who have four children, ages 6, 4, 2 and 6 months – to tap into their inner resources like never before. "We've had to get creative," said Sarah. "It's been a great blessing for us."

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The struggle has brought Sarah and Paul closer together and allowed the children to spend more time with their father. Now, after throwing around new business ideas such as a bread baking company, the couple recently launched Bloomin' Art to teach youngsters to tap into their inner Van Gogh.

"I've never baked a loaf of bread in my life," said Sarah. But she's been an artist since she was a child, and her mother was an artist. Sarah paints murals for a living when she can, and in this area has painted murals in the teacher's lounge of a Meridian math magnet school, as well as in an upscale private residence in Eagle.

Paul is the business manager of Bloomin' Art and handles all the bookkeeping. He also made the promotional materials and hired a Web designer to create www.bloominart.net.

Laughing about the bread-baking scheme, Sarah said, "There are talents you have and you should work with the talents you've been given. You get in a hole, and you keep digging. ... We had lost sight of what we naturally had."

She referred to Paul as her "wonderfully prepared husband." He saved money long before things turned bad.

"We didn't live beyond our means, and we didn't buy a bigger house than we needed," she said, emphasizing they easily could have been enticed to buy too much house for their income, with Paul working for

can be an artist. Kids will be taught to see the world in terms of shapes, forms and colors; will learn in a quiet environment; and will be guided by such principles as "If you don't like [some-thing you draw], learn from it."

Sarah believes her talents and Paul's complement each other – something she didn't find out until he was laid off. "I've found my best friend. It's a beautiful thing," she said.