

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

June 2019

The Social Construction of Retirement: One Woman's Experience



By Bonnie Milne

I retired from my full time Lecturer's position at RMIT Vietnam in June of 2017. My husband and I had made plans for our retirement. We would spend six months a year in our house in Palm Springs, California and the other six months on Salt Spring Island in our small, water front, off the grid, water access only cabin.

The first year of retirement flew by. I spent six weeks in Australia with my daughter, son in law and grandchildren, topped off by New Years and a week of sightseeing in Paris with two of my granddaughters! The following summer, my husband and I worked nonstop renovating a rental house our family invested in on Salt Spring Island.

In October 2018 the proverbial shit hit the fan! I found myself writing in my journal about my lack of focus. It was as if the future we had planned had arrived and I had no clue what was next. I was waiting to see how my health was before I made plans. This struck me as absurd! Why wouldn't I make plans and carry them out as I always had? If my health changed, I would deal with it!

But how had this stalemate happened? How had I arrived at this stage of my life so ill prepared? Why didn't I have a plan? Why did I think my health would deteriorate simply because I retired? How could I be realistic about my future? What could I expect? What would keep me motivated and full of light and life?

I began to research. I wanted and needed a focus – a purpose, really, and it seemed to me that 'giving back' or 'paying forward' was what I wanted to do. I began to search out engaging, challenging volunteer opportunities. At the same time, I began educating myself on the process of aging and started exploring how others managed their retirement years.

There is, of course, a lot written on aging and retirement. I did, however, find it difficult to find consistent information. For example, when I tried to determine the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's the numbers varied (a lot). What is clear is that many people will develop Alzheimer's – meaning there will be many people who will require care. Juxtaposed with this information is the decrease in the number of people over the age of 65 and over the age of 85 entering care homes over the past twenty years, a trend that is expected to continue. I'm not yet ready to wrap up my research but I am at the point where I am finding repletion – a great sign!

From what I've read, here's what's sticking:

A healthy happy retirement includes:

- a focus, a mission, a passion, a purpose, a challenge (take your pick)
- a plan that we are prepared and able to alter
- friends – extremely important – loneliness has the same degree of impact on our health as smoking
- learning, being curious, being open
- a hobby, a volunteer position, work that we love (or all three)
- exercise – weight training is at the top of the list
- whole nutritious food

Repeatedly, I've read that the path to the fountain of life includes reduced caloric intake. Yikes!

To me this list looks very much like a funhouse mirror of my life before retirement.

Some work, lots of socializing, learning, exercising and less eating. I am beginning to embrace my retirement!

Some Books and Websites I've Found Useful

Though these books are not all about retirement, they are about changing the way we approach our lives and the benefit of being open to inconsistency and uncertainty, both of which we face as we age.

The links take you to a book review and where there are no links, I've added my comments.

Pollan, Michael. 2009. [*In Defense of Food An Eater's Manifesto*](#). Penguin Press

Pollan, Michael. 2018. [*How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence*](#). Penguin Press

Marie Kondo, Marie. 2016. [*Spark Joy An Illustrated Master Class on the Art of Organizing*](#) Ten Speed Press

Pink, Daniel H. 2011 [*Drive The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*](#)
Riverhead Books

Gaines, Chip and Gaines, Joanna. 2016. *The Magnolia Story*. W Publishing
An exuberant look at the joy of turning what you love and know into a business.

Schwalbe, Will. 2013. *The End of Your Life Book Club* Vintage Canada
This book is about the joy of reading and the joy of sharing what we are reading with others. It demonstrates how these conversations can give us a focus outside of our everyday life and provide the opportunity to touch on areas of our lives that we might otherwise not share. Plus, a great list of books to read!

Harris, Dan. 2014. [*10% Happier How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found a Self-Help That Actually Works*](#). It Books

Sandberg, Sheryl. 2013. [*Lean In Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*](#)
I think if we substitute 'seniors' for 'women' in this book, we might develop a clearer picture of what holds us back as we age.

Barr, Nancy Verde. 2007. *Backstage with Julia My Years with Julia Child* Wiley New Jersey
A great read about a life well lived. Julia passed away days before her 90th birthday and continued to work well into her 80's. She banned the word 'tired' from her workplace.

Zelinski, Ernie J. 2008. *How to Retire Happy, Wild and Free Retirement wisdom that you won't get from your financial advisor*. Visions International Publishing Edmonton Alberta 2008

A raucous look at retirement with great information on planning and thinking clearly about what you want to do with your time and your life when you retire.

Gall, Terry & R. Evans, David. 2000. *Pre-retirement expectations and the quality of life of male retirees in later retirement*. [*Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*](#) 32(3):187-197 · July 2000

Graydon, Shari(editor). 2011. *I Feel Great about My Hands and Other Unexpected Joys of Aging*. Douglas and McIntyre, Vancouver, Toronto, Berkeley

Interesting Web Pages

Best Places to Retire 2019 International Living

<https://internationalliving.com/the-best-places-to-retire/>

Best Places to Retire in Canada

<https://www.bestplacesretire.com/best-places-to-retire-in-canada/>

<https://www.slice.ca/money/photos/top-20-best-places-to-retire-in-canada/>

<https://roamnewroads.ca/7-of-the-best-places-to-retire-across-canada/moncton-nb/>

This is a website for the Netherlands that clearly describes what one needs to be able to do to live on one's own. It also suggests that there are ICT innovations that will help people continue to live independently.

<https://www.government.nl/topics/care-and-support-at-home/living-independently-for-longer>

This website describes the ICT projects that are available and are in the production or research phase.

<https://www.aal-europe.eu/>

This is a report on the social isolation of seniors in Canada with some examples of programs that are in place across the country to reduce or address social isolation.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/national-seniors-council/programs/publications-reports/2014/social-isolation-seniors/page05.html>