

Retirement is a bankers' fallacy

Birds I View

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Canada geese Carnmenville – 1 down, 1 up [photo: B Montevecchi]

“Are you still at university?” “Have you retired yet?” These are questions that I hear on a regular basis. Retirement is a well-ingrained practice in our society.

Is it me or is this just a weird word? Retired? It is it something that you do to your car when the tires are worn out? Re-tire it. Or rather might it mean if you're tired, you can get tired again? Both sound unappealing by either derivation.

Margaret Wendte, a former journalist with the *National Post* currently with the *Globe and Mail*, has written some crassly disturbing things about Newfoundland, climate change and other topics. I disagree with most of what she writes, though her take on retirement as a bankers' fallacy designed to entice young people to pack away cash for future happiness seemed spot on. While planning for future uncertainty is a useful tactic, there is no need to subvert delusions of carefree contentment to some future time.

The “early” retirements of provincial and federal employees might be better seen as “early” pension collecting. Many of these pensioners continue working often in similar ways, such as teaching elsewhere. These folks cash in on the bankers' fallacy and work onward.

I am not implying that people haven't earned their pensions or that pensions are not important, but rather emphasize that when people stop working at one job they often redirect their working pursuits. This is what we have always done and will hopefully continue to – keep working while we are able and motivated to do so.

Assuming ability is intact, motivation is key. To be grounded in what you do, to feel invigorated and disciplined in doing it and to work with vision and purpose beyond the immediate task at hand is privilege and a blessing.

And for those who continue working, it's not a matter of old folks keeping jobs from the young. At Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador where I work, we are experiencing ongoing decadal cut-backs in tenured faculty positions. These cutbacks are occurring in the face of an expanding bureaucracy and increasing casual and temporary positions for scores and scores of young highly-talented scholars of all stripes. It doesn't have to be this way.

Not all work is the same

Many professions require the high-performance physical skills of athletes or the strength and dexterity of carpenters, plumbers and sanitation engineers. These trades often carry more limited shelf-lives than those of teachers, artists and accountants. Specific types of physical work must be tempered, readjusted and eventually ceased if one is fortunate not to die young. The same no doubt holds for mental pursuits though with luck there may be more latitude here.

My elegant grandfather after whom I was named (but not personified) was a foreman in foundry. It was brutal high-risk work with minimal safety standards and little protective gear. When he started work as a teen-aged immigrant in the USA, he would bike 16 miles in the early morning hours to the sweatshop and 16 miles back in the evening. He was lucky – he had bike.

Things changed ... he did well, and at 65 he got his gold watch and walked away without looking back. Then he and my grandmother travelled back to Italy, wintered in Florida and lived a good life. Yet something seemed missing from his life. He wasn't sad, he seemed content though rather bored at times. He needed something other than relaxation, travel and companionship to fill the void left by 50 years on the job. I wish he could have found it.

Ted Russell has offered some insight about work and retirement from Pigeon Inlet when Uncle Mose asked Grandpa Walcott why he kept working after he got his pension. "In the first place", Grandpa replied, "we like work. Perhaps we're old-fashioned. But we [he and Grandma Walcott] think while people are workin' they're really livin'. But after they give up workin' – well, they're more or less just lying around waiting around waiting to die."

Retirement can and often does infuse enjoyable and spirit-raising dimensions to one's life. Many of my kin and friends are very happily retired. Some are younger than me. Most enjoy new their new adventures and activities and are gracefully navigating and appreciating life's changing landscapes. Maybe they're all just braver, smarter and happier than I am ... I wish them well.

Birds in the area

In late October sooty shearwaters were abundant along the Straight Shore of Bonavista Bay (Megan Boucher), at Cape Race along with hundreds of gannets (Tony Power) and in Hamilton Sound in numbers that seem unprecedented to local fishermen (Edison Easton).

Flocks of gannets diving inshore in the Baccalieu Tickle in late October (Mary Lou Riggs) may have been pursuing autumn spawning mackerel being fished in the area.

Canada geese are migrating into our area as indicated by substantial flocks in Carmanville and Noggin Cove on Halloween. A newly-arrived lone Canada goose in Bowring Park is being harassed by a highly territorial and aggressive not-so-sweet city-owned swan (Walter Harding).

Nature NL sponsored a shoreline dune hike and a birding and berry picking outing from the Auk House in Musgrave Harbour on the weekend of 17 – 18 October. The blueberry bushes were colbalt with ripe fruit, and the birders generated an impressive list of 40 species, including a juvenile indigo bunting and 23 red crossbills (Meagan Boucher).

Gray jays were seen feasting on road-kills on the highway near Deadman's Bay and on the Labrador highway near Muskrat Falls.

Flocks of hearty snow bunting from the Canadian Arctic are winging it in the winds and sea-spray around the coasts.

Vote

As the provincial campaigns of hollow promises, self-serving allegiances, blatant opportunism and utterly appalling, irresponsible and unsustainable pork-barrel financial give-aways proliferate from all sides, try to go placidly through the noise and waste. And ... remember Don Dunphy.

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