



Who's the New You in Retirement?

*Embrace your dreams
and your new life*

By Vickie Townson

Recently, a new acquaintance asked me: “What does your husband do?” My response was “Oh, Bill’s retired.” As if the sum of Bill’s being and life experience was somehow captured in the word “retired”. Sound familiar?

A similar situation arises when you fill out an information form after the end of your working career. What answer do you put in the space for “occupation”? Do you use the word “retired”?

Let’s not lose sight of the fact that retirement is merely a new stage in the journey of life, not the definition of who you are. You are more than just retired! So often we see retirement as the end of a productive career rather than the opportunity that it really is - a time to explore and do what you want.

You have a wealth of knowledge and experience to call upon as you create this new chapter in your life. It is an opportunity to reclaim your dreams and desires, reconnect with what is meaningful and re-invent yourself and your life. While the idea of re-inventing yourself may seem daunting and unfamiliar at first, it is easier than you think. The first step is to reclaim your back burner ideas and trust that greater self-awareness and insight will unfold in the process.

Reclaim the Back-burner

What do I mean by the back burner? It represents those things that you kept putting off doing because of the demands of family and career, or a lack of time and money. It might be the book you dreamed of writing, the trip you always wanted to take, the course you thought would be interesting, or the hobby you never had time for.

In reclaiming the backburner ideas, you become re-acquainted with your inner child, the place where curiosity and wonder originate. Robert Fritz, author of the book *Your Life as Art* gives an excellent definition of inner child:

“...the inner child is not...the idealized vision that some would put on childhood. It isn’t becoming a child again, it is adding to our adulthood a dimension of yourself that was lost for a while, but can be rediscovered, reborn, and renewed.”

An example is Joan. She combines her love of travel and passion for the outdoors by cycling through Europe with biking tours for the 50+ age group. She is able to see the world in a safe, fun environment with people who share her sense of adventure.

Louise reclaimed her childhood desire to paint and started watercolour painting lessons. She paints regularly with her fellow students and at home. As she explores her love of colour, letting go of any feeling that she somehow needs to produce a masterpiece, her natural creativity is blossoming.

As a way to reclaim your unfulfilled dreams and desires, you need to consider some questions:

- What is the hobby or artistic endeavour you think it is too late to learn?
- What is the dream you always wanted, but gave up on?
- If you didn't feel you had to do it perfectly, what would you try?

Your responses to such questions will begin to paint the picture of what your retirement could be. They will give you insight into who you want to be and what you want to include. Remember, you are the artist creating and designing your own life.

Reclaiming your dreams is also a way of contributing to yourself, which is essential for a fulfilling retirement. It is, however, only one side of a two-sided coin. The other side of the coin is the contribution you wish to make to others in a way that is meaningful to you and that will give you a renewed sense of purpose.

What's Meaningful

Before retirement, your purpose came from your career and possibly family responsibilities. At the ending of your working career, you now have the time to consider your legacy or how you want to be remembered. It is an opportunity to contribute to your family or community in a way that is meaningful to you. It is also important not to fall into the trap of "busyness" – saying yes to every request from a sense of obligation or feeling you "should". Make sure that you are choosing to become involved because it is an area where you want to make a difference. It is a place where spending your time is both enjoyable and meaningful.

Bob is a good example. He initially considered the focus of his retirement to be obtaining his Masters Degree. His vision did not expand any further than taking another course. At a Retirement Workshop,

Bob reconnected with a desire that he had ignored for some time but that filled him with enthusiasm. He had always been interested in aboriginal culture, so rather than going back to school, he chose to volunteer at a local aboriginal community centre. He is contributing his time and expertise and, in return, he is learning about a culture that resonates with him.

Marta's contribution circles around her family. Each year she organizes and hosts a family reunion weekend that currently includes four generations. A highlight of the annual event is acknowledging each family member and expressing the difference they make in one another's lives.

By reclaiming your dreams and creative ideas, and reconnecting with what is meaningful to you, you are well on the way to re-inventing yourself and your future.

So, what will you respond the next time someone asks: "What do you do?"

How about: world traveler, writer, painter, musician, dancer, golfer, walker, hiker, cook, explorer, adventurer, entertainer, cultural buff, mentor, teacher, world's best grandparent, environmentalist, or volunteer extraordinaire?

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Vickie Townson, PCC, Life Transition Coach and co-founder of the More Than Just Retired event, leads seminars and workshops on Retirement Lifestyle Planning. She also coaches individuals, couples and groups through the transition process to overcome any roadblocks and create their desired future. See www.morethanjustretired.com