



The Last Leaf

Number 11 Winter 2004
Published for AAPA and NAPA by
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Orlando, FL 32835
An electronic journal

WHERE DID THE TIME GO?

RETIREMENT IS that wonderful part of life when everyone *finally* has all the time they need to begin doing the things they have put off for years. I recall fondly all the good times I planned for; the long lazy days to spend on a wide stretch of deserted beach ~ just soaking up the sun and watching the tide come in and go out; total relaxation; freedom from all the trappings of a career. Heaven on earth!

And how about the two hundred or so books languishing on bookcase shelves? At last there is time to catch up on the best novels, as well as biographies and history. Since high school, I have wanted to know more about the Aztecs, the Incas, and the ancient Egyptians. With all the free time that retirement brings, there's virtually no limit to how much I can read!

My fascination with steam locomotives can now be indulged and hours of fun await; I fantasize about operating my model railroad system, perhaps running several trains at the same time on tracks equipped with operating switches and signals!

Music! I can now fill my days with all my favorite music and no one will object ... not even if I play the same song over and over. Such freedom is just reward for having worked so many years; it's time of my own that I *worked* for, certainly. I have a stack of movies on video tape and DVD that I can play anytime I like. Boredom will disappear from my life as soon as my retirement begins, so let the good times roll!

Those were my feelings eleven years ago when I retired after spending thirty-four years in a company whose policies were among the most employee-friendly in America. For all my retirement plans, it was with sincere regret that I left my desk for the last time and passed a huge milestone in my life.

What better way to begin retirement than to drive off into the sunset on a trip of more than two thousand miles? Stay off the super highways—pick the backroads where you can see life as it *really* is along the way. What I experienced on that trip is life as it really is when your prostate gland begins to get larger and wrecks your bladder's functions, so that you either must go *at this instant* whether you are standing before the usual toilet or not, and you must go *at this instant* even if not a drop is passed! Super highways commonly have rest stops at reasonable intervals, but not so backroads. I became adept at locating establishments with public facilities. By the time this trip was over, I would be an *expert* toilet locator.

OK, take a breather when the trip is over and see a friendly urologist. In less than three months he was able to diagnose my problem as BPH and prescribe a medication that I'd likely be taking for the rest of my life. Who cares? The main thing is to get back to the *enjoyment* of being retired!

While I was undergoing the various tests and fighting the infection I had picked up on the trip, I had a chance to start the reading that I had looked forward to for so long. After two of John Grisham's novels and about 100 pages into one of Robin Cook's, I thought I'd rest my eyes for a few days and put a new coat of paint on the outside of the house—after all, there would be plenty of time for reading later, and I did need a bit of exercise. The painting went well and after only four weeks I was ready to get back to my book.

Then I remembered that my high school class reunion was to be held on the following Saturday ... which meant another trip was coming up in just two days. Clean the car! Buy film! Dig through a stack of photos to find the class picture and decide what clothing to take. The book was put aside. I was really lucky to be retired and not have to worry about taking time off from work. The reunion was fun, but I was glad to get home so I could finish reading *VITAL SIGNS*.

Before that happened, however, my family met in a business session and convinced me that there was a really great need for a produce market in a small town just ten miles away, and that it was a golden opportunity for a retired person to make a killing selling fresh fruits and vegetables. It couldn't be much of a big deal; I had grown up in my father's grocery store and my wife had always wanted a store of her own, so why not? The answer was clear in just two years: there actually was *not* a great need for a produce market in that little town. With no reluctance at all I gave up the twelve-hour days and the Wednesday 2:00AM trips to market (eighty miles away) plus the deliveries to area restaurants and pick-ups from local suppliers of seafood. For a *produce* store? Yep. I didn't know that seafood was considered produce, but in that town it was. There was definitely no killing to be made, so I retired ... again.

Now I could get back to the fun time of life. I noticed that my bookshelves had grown even more crowded during the two years of training in produce marketing. I returned to Robin's book with a vengeance. Then my family doctor called to set up an office visit right away; the tests from my physical last week had revealed a problem—there was blood in my urine. So off to my urologist I go! Then in sequence came: X-rays, a consultation where I learned that I had multiple kidney stones and needed immediate out-patient surgery to remove them, the operation itself and the post-operative procedures which took almost three weeks during which all my lifetime modesty was rudely stripped away. One week following recuperation I was X-rayed again, then another consultation was held and I found that several kidney stones had escaped the doctor's efforts. Now it was time to do it all over again. After the second round was over I was gratified to know that all the stones were gone, and that modesty was not a problem, since I had lost it before.

Needless to say, I never unpacked my model railroad. Some progress has been made in reading, since I did finish *VITAL SIGNS*, but now the house needs painting again both inside and out and a remodeling is underway. I baby-sit a lot with my grandchildren, also. Two other reunions are on tap, and my wife is planning another long trip. I'm glad I don't sleep much now; I need the time for reading. #