

What works; what doesn't



By Ruth Latta

Retirement is about the “rapid expansion of possibilities,” write Julie Chahall and Linda Lucas, in *Happily Retired: What works... what doesn't* (Polygon Consulting, 34 Bei St. Ottawa K2G OK7, ISBN 978-0-9811916- 0-7, \$20) Dictionary definitions of “retirement” focus too much on the old way of life being left behind, they believe. To Chahall and Lucas, retirement is a new phase which can be “vigorous and purposeful.”

When in their forties, Chahall and Lucas left longterm careers, Chahall's in government and Lucas's at a college. They know that retirement is a huge transition, involving “loss of familiarity,” “loss of social context” and “loss of identity” in a society where paid employment still defines a big part of who you are. “Take charge of your life,” they urge. Each individual must find interests and pursuits that appeal to his or her unique nature and personality: “A common mistake is to succumb to what others think you should want to do.” The authors suggest taking an inventory of yourself to “peel away layers of social conditioning” and gain insights into what you really want. Personal inventories take various forms, including a journal, in which you can sort out your griefs, angers, fears, satisfactions, joys and desires.

In *Happily Retired*, the emphasis is on happiness. Negative thoughts should be blocked and “reframed” in a positive way. Happiness, say the authors, is the sum of Pleasure (fun), Engagement (involvement) and Meaning (a sense of connection to something larger than oneself.) Finding meaning is a huge, deep, personal area, so the authors provide a bibliography for individual exploration.

The authors' conversational writing style is engaging, and their “field-tested pointers” may surprise readers. For instance, they regard mistakes, even big mistakes, like buying an RV and finding that you don't like that form of travel, as learning experiences. “This stage of life is a whole new game and you do not yet know what works and what does not,” they write. Retirement is also a great time for positive learning experiences, and not necessarily in a classroom setting. In offering a number of websites related to adult learning, Chahall and Lucas remind

readers that learning something new involves a period when one looks “less than competent.” They advise retirees to give the endeavour a fair chance.

Retirement should involve sorting out, not only physical clutter, but also emotional baggage. Dwelling on past events, such as the “boss-from-hell” who forced you into early retirement, wastes energy. You should also “let go of relationships that no longer contribute to your life, and roles that are no longer relevant.” For instance, you might consider seeing less of the domineering friend who monopolizes you, erodes your self-esteem and keeps you from new social contacts.

What of paid employment? Like volunteer work, a post-retirement paid job ideally allows the employees to “express aspects” of themselves that may have “lain dormant” during their previous careers.

Reading *Happily Retired*, I longed to ask the authors about many things; for instance, the putdowns that older people experience daily, and the generalizations made about the 55-plus group. Hoping that *Happily Retired* will start a dialogue, Chahall and Lucas urge readers to continue the discussion at their website <http://www.happily-retired.com> Perhaps our feedback will inspire them to write a sequel.

This article originally appeared in the _____ issue of Forever Young Newspaper.