

FEATURE

The joy of retirement on a snowy morning

By Tom Rowan
Catholic News Service

"You'll be miserable," I was told. "You won't have anything to do." "You'll be at loose ends." "You won't like it."

The topic was my impending retirement several years ago. I had been working hard for more than 40 years, the last 30 of which as editor of the Catholic Standard, the Washington archdiocesan newspaper. I enjoyed the job, liked and admired the people I worked with, hoped I was doing some good and relished the challenges.

But, joined at the hip with these pluses were long hours, frequent weekend work, inevitable hassles and constant interruptions from subscribers and others demanding that I explain why a story or letter to the editor had or had not run. Recent years also had seen an acceleration of administrative duties which, like when I had shingles, I bore heroically but with minimal enthusiasm.

Anyway, I decided to retire. After 30 years even a hardened convict should be eligible for parole.

When the news was announced, everyone wished me well, although some were skeptical of my future tranquillity, especially since I don't play golf, don't garden nor have a basement workshop, and am pathetically inept at any home-repair task.

Then there was a longtime acquaintance, a director of an archdiocesan cemetery, who invited me, "now that you'll have more time" to stop by and receive a personal tour of the delights of his cemetery.

The great day arrived. After a spectacularly generous farewell party by my admirable staff — I chose to interpret their ex-

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uberant cheerfulness as indicating good will for me rather than their reaction to the certainty of my leaving — I was officially retired.

So how has retirement worked out?

It has turned out great. I took to retirement like a cat to a bowl of cream. I recommend it to everyone who asks, and even those who don't. And I haven't degenerated into an unshaven bum, at least not yet. Nor have I accepted the kind offer of a cemetery tour.

What do I do? I go for walks. I read. I linger over breakfast and the morning paper. I only take on projects that appeal to me. On occasion I give in to my long-thwarted fondness for sleeping late. The main advantage of retirement is that I can make my own schedule. Within legal and moral limits I can do what I want when I want. To paraphrase Rudy Vallee's sugary signature song, "My Time Is My Time."

I see more of my wife, Anne, the light of my life who gave me industrial-strength support throughout my working days. We do more together now. We eat out more often. We go to the movies, and there are few pleasures to match going to the movies on a weekday afternoon when the rest of the world is working. We take occasional short trips and leisurely vacations.

But along with its delights, retirement brings hazards. I knew those people were out there, crouched like panthers in the underbrush, and, sure enough, when word got out that I was retired, they pounced: recruiters from worthy organizations and purveyors of worthy projects, all intent on



Illustration by Linda Jeanne Rivers

sucking me in. I didn't quite need a whip and a chair to hold them at bay, but I did learn to follow Nancy Reagan's advice to young people, "Just say 'no.'"

Of course, one mustn't be rigid. I gratefully accepted a kind invitation to write a column for the paper I edited, I expanded a bit my parish volunteer work, I signed on as a precinct election official, I have become a semi-big shot in the Sierra Club, and I agreed to help put out the National Press Club's newsletter.

Do I miss the work? No. Do I miss the people? Not really, since we keep in touch. I make other occasional visits and have what my wife's retired English cousin once called "a good chin wag with my mates."

Retirement has brought many pleasures, but the ultimate pleasure — the one to which I had long looked forward — was

more than a year in coming. The necessary ingredients were a heavy snowfall and a Tuesday. You see, Tuesday was and still is the paper's deadline day. All photos and all unfinished and unwritten stories must be completed, edited, assigned a place and packaged into a coherent and preferably attractive issue. Absence from work on a Tuesday, a crowded and hectic day, was never an option.

I awoke one wintry Tuesday morning, opened the bedroom drapes and beheld a snowfall that would have inspired Jack London to rhapsodic literary heights. It was rapidly burying my car and heavy enough to obscure the house across the street. The radio reported that traffic was a hopeless mess and the snow would continue all day. I closed the drapes, padded back to bed, snuggled under the covers and went back to sleep. Now that's living.



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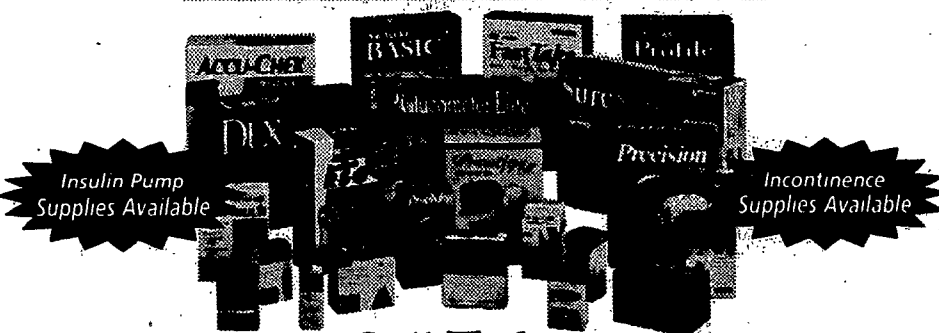
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