

When the Old Profs Are Put Out to Pasture

The Sun Still Shone: Professors Talk About Retirement

By Lorraine Dorfman

Iowa City, Iowa: Iowa University Press, 1997.

Reviewed by Joel C. Snell

Near the end of last November, I received a letter marked confidential from the administration that asked, quite directly, if I would like to retire?

For a brief and shadowy moment, the earth moved under my feet. Retire?

My academic life has been pell mell. I usually teach 15 hours a semester, and I've tried to do 5 to 10 articles, book reviews, and papers a year for the last thirty years. Then, in the summer of 96, I had a heart attack and quadruple by-pass surgery. So, should I retire?

Professor Lorraine T. Dorfman's *The Sun Still Shone: Professors Talk About Retirement* is an excellent account of what academics do when they move on from their profession into retirement.

This is a down to earth account of in-depth interviews of teachers from four-year postsecondary institutions of all types in the United States and England. It's heavy on descriptive narrative and insight and avoids mind numbing number crunching.

My own experience talking to those that have gone before me is that the professors' reactions and perceptions dramatically vary.

One business professor I know, now in retirement, curses each new dawn. On the other hand, an ac-

counting professor and his newly-retired wife developed wanderlust and have traveled all over the country in their motor home. Like the late Charles Karrault of CBS, they consciously avoid the interstates so that they can see Americana up close. For them, retirement is a joy.

Professor Dorfman's book affirms my own perceptions, but there is so much more.

Academics would prefer to retire gradually, this author discovers, and find solace in planning their retirement. Most do not move from their present residences. They continue to read and try to remain current in their fields. They miss students and the professional status that they once had.

They covet library privileges and seek to continue in things that are creative. Some channel their energies into voluntary organizations. Many establish offices in their home and do some consulting.

They miss their office or lab on campus. Many enjoyed the structure of the work day and work week. Some have the feeling of separation and neglect as if they miss "ongoing" life.

Retirement is both easy to explain and yet a conundrum, according to Dorfman. Ultimately, a teacher can become something else and whatever that is, it can last a

long time and can be bewildering. "Many people now live one, two, or three decades after retirement," she notes.

Dorfman captures the emotions, angst, and exhilaration of moving on into retirement of this atypical population of professionals. Coincidentally, I've had an opportunity to visit the campuses of all the schools in the United States where she conducted her interviews with more than 400 retired and soon to be retired academics.

Each of these campuses is attractive enough to discourage a retiring professor from breaking their professional ties completely.

Thought & Action readers would enjoy *The Sun Still Shone*.

It's about real people in the real world of academia as they face retirement with bittersweet ambivalence.

My own decision-making has been sharpened and improved by Dorfman's book. If and when my day comes, I'll know what it's like in academic after-life. ■

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