

Retirement, Hibernation, and Renewal

Category: Aging

written by Anonymous | February 29, 2020

I retired from a deeply satisfying teaching career just before I turned sixty-five, having always thought I would keep teaching well into my seventies. The decision came in the aftermath of my parents' illnesses and deaths.

The years between stroke and death for both my mother and father seem, with hindsight, to have been a time of accelerated aging for me, not so much in my legs and arms and feet as in my heart and brain. Not so much the aging that reaps wisdom but the aging that topples into vulnerability. The aging that makes it seem too hard to keep up with a challenging job, to keep giving my students the education they deserve. The aging that makes each ache or pain or worry that I would have shrugged off at a younger age feel like inevitable decline, a one-way street.

It's been two years since I retired. From time to time, I have a sudden burst of energy and insight that makes me remember how much I can still offer the world. More often, I avoid interacting with people. What a change from dozens of conversations every day with so many different people. What a change from feeling competent and confident in being out in the world. "I feel I'm just putting in time before I die," I found myself telling my husband the other day.

This week is the anniversary of my mother's death. My mother always thought I worked too hard. I imagine she would be glad I'm retired now, glad if it means I have time to read and write and go to the movies.

Maybe some day I'll look back on these early years of retirement and realize they were a period of hibernation, preparation for springtime renewal, for aging through new growth.

Anonymous