

FOR TEACHING, AFTER TEACHING

THE MAKINGS OF A HEALTHY LIFE

by Carol Baird-Krul and Enise Olding

We have, over several issues, profiled a number of former teachers who have, in some way or another, chosen to continue to teach during their retirement. All have decided that their involvement with education was an important part of their post teaching life. Trevor Muise enjoys many things, most particularly helping people learn and grow while learning new things himself. As with many people who have attended our workshops or read our book *Transition to Retirement: the Uncharted Course*, Trevor took time to reflect and carefully consider his post retirement life. He certainly had many interests and options, but as you read his responses you will also learn, that for him, having a healthy, well rounded life in retirement involved continuing to learn and to teach.



What was your original area of work in education?

My first position was teaching English at a junior high/middle school. Originally, as with most young teachers, I wanted to pass on to my students my love of literature and the English language; but I soon discovered that my passion for the subject was not enough, and the most successful teachers I knew were those who cared about their students first and foremost and their subject second. Once I realized this I decided to continue my studies after which I became a high school counsellor.

How many years did you work within the educational system in Canada?

I worked in a Canadian school district for 35 years.

What type of work/volunteering are you now involved in?

When I retired I felt I needed to take time to consider my options and figure out how I wanted to spend my retirement, so after a period of two years I became involved with three organizations as a volunteer and I also took on a part time job.

The first organization I volunteer for is a foundation that supports vulnerable students through a variety of programs in our local school district. As well, I do volunteer tutoring for a literacy organization that works with individual adults, the aboriginal community, prison inmates and new Canadians. I also volunteer with Audience Services at our local theatre. Finally, I have a contract to work one day a



Carol and Enise (info@drassociates.ca) are the creators of a series of pre-retirement and post-retirement planning workshops: *Transition to Retirement: The Uncharted Course*®, *Recently Retired: Charting a New Course*® and *Ideas... Enhanced and Advanced*®, and authors of *Transition to Retirement: The Uncharted Course*. Previous articles on retirement may be viewed in back issues at CanadianTeacherMagazine.com.

week as a career counsellor at a private rehabilitation facility. In my work there I meet with individual patients who have completed the basic treatment program and have chosen to stay on for a time. I evaluate their particular work situation and try to help them to make career choices that will be conducive to a balanced, healthy lifestyle and continued sobriety. I help patients look for new jobs, apply for retraining or education programs, start new businesses, write resumes, practise their interview skills and develop job search strategies. I also do career testing for those patients who don't have a job to go back to or those who might want a plan B in case the current job doesn't work out. For patients who are already retired or transitioning into retirement, I help them look at how they plan to spend their time once they leave the centre.

What were your reasons for deciding to continue to work/volunteer after retirement?

I believe in the organizations I am involved with and I wanted to give back to my community. As far as my paid work goes, I genuinely enjoy using my teaching and counselling skills now that I don't have to attend meetings or deal with the politics of education. Also, the paid work goes into my travel fund and allows me to do things I might struggle to do otherwise. As an example, I was able to go to Cuba for two weeks with one of two choirs with whom I sing bass. During our stay we performed in Havana and Cienfuegos and met with Cuban choirs and musical performers. As well, we had interesting tours and a week-long stay at an all inclusive resort for some R and R.

What made you decide on this particular type of work/volunteering?

I think all my choices of volunteer and paid work reflect my career as a school counsellor and my particular enjoyment of the arts. As a former school counsellor, I wanted to continue to support young people to successfully continue their education and break the cycle of poverty. Working with new Canadians lets me learn about their cultures while helping them to learn English and adapt to our culture. I think immigration is important to the future of Canada, but I believe it will become problematic if we don't support the transition of new Canadians to our way of life. The work I do at the theatre is very much a reflection of personal interest in the arts. When I was teaching I produced a number of school plays and was the yearbook sponsor in both of the high schools in which I taught. My work at the treatment centre is important, not just because of my trip fund, but because I can help people fighting addiction to come out of treatment with the best hope of success for a life of sobriety.

How has your background in education aided you in what you are now doing?

I wouldn't have had the chance to volunteer teaching English to new Canadians if I didn't have teacher training and a TEFL certificate, nor would I have been hired as a career counsellor without my Masters degree in Counselling Psychology and the experience of running a career centre in a high school. I think that working with sometimes less than cooperative teenagers in a high school and dealing with students from different cultural backgrounds has helped me to be more understanding of different people and ideas. Also, being a counsellor made me listen harder to hear the personal truths behind the stories. I think my varied professional experiences such as being on the executive of the BC School Counsellors Association, giving wellness workshops for the provincial association, and organizing two major conferences have shown me how much thought and hard work go into many organizational tasks and policies, and have left me less critical of conflicting viewpoints about how to tackle complex problems.

What challenges did you encounter in your new endeavours that you did not expect and how did you deal with them?

I found that working with adult new Canadians learning English requires very different techniques from teaching teenagers in the classroom. I have had to relearn and adapt from situation to situation and individual to individual. This is a good thing as it holds my interest and forces me to grow. Career counselling with adults who are fighting addiction is different from working with grade 11 and 12s in a high school, but I have enjoyed the new challenges and the opportunity to continue to learn myself.

What have been the rewards of your new endeavours?

The rewards are the satisfaction of a job well done, the new connections in the community to individuals I have taught, counselled, or met as a volunteer. However, this brings its own problems as I am constantly running into people I know and have to tax my aging brain to figure out who they are and in what context I know them.

What impact has your choice had on your life in general?

I find I am happier than I have been at any other time in my life. I have met individuals from all walks of life and from all parts of Canada, the USA, as well as further afield, and these people and my time with them has been enriching.

Were you ever worried that you might have made a mistake in your choice? Did you have a Plan B?

My life is made up of many small pieces with volunteering, paid work, hobbies and activities, family, friends, and just enough down time and travel to recharge my batteries. At times I have quit one thing, such as sitting on my condo board which I didn't enjoy, and replaced it with something else which I do enjoy, such as my volunteer teaching. Since I haven't put all my retirement eggs in one basket I don't have to make any huge changes when things start to slide. The trick, I think, is to constantly pay attention to the balance of activities in my life and make small adjustments so that I don't feel too busy on the one hand or start to get bored on the other.

How long do you hope to be doing the type of work you are now doing?

I plan to continue with my paid work at least until I turn 65 in two years. As for the volunteer work I will see how I feel as I go along. Nothing is written in stone. I will only do what I am doing as long as I enjoy it and as long as I feel I am doing a good job. Besides, who knows what other interesting challenges or opportunities might present themselves. I need to be ready to change and adapt as I go along.

What advice would you give to other educators contemplating retirement?

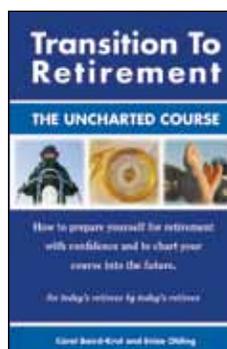
The best advice I received when I retired was to commit to very little for the first year or so. Let yourself adapt to the space and time your retirement creates, rather than rushing to fill the void. Take time to explore and try things on before you commit to all the requests that can come your way, and don't take on anything out of guilt.

You paid your dues during your long working life, now it is time to do the things you want to do for as long as they continue to be a pleasure.

Do you have any further thoughts or comments about your retirement choice?

I learned long ago that I could only work as a counsellor and teacher helping others if I took care of myself first. The same holds true in retirement—pay attention to what your body, mind and spirit are telling you. That way you stand a better chance of staying happy and healthy and you will have something to give back.

Each person's approach to retirement is predicated on their circumstances, their goals and their dreams, but taking time to consider what you want and how you will achieve it is important. In some cases retirement will have a clear and singular focus while others may have a broader scope. Certainly, we can see from Trevor's decisions that a little bit of this, a little bit of that can make for a rewarding life and a healthy lifestyle.



Transition to Retirement The Uncharted Course

Transition to Retirement: The Uncharted Course reveals what there is to learn about that crucial transitional phase from when you leave your job to when you feel significantly engaged in the life of retirement. It is not about finances or lifestyle; it is about you—the person behind the work title, name-tag or job description and how to discover who you are or will be outside of your job.

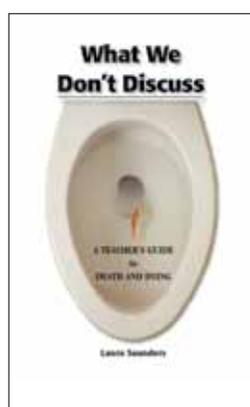
The authors used a nautical theme to introduce the phases of the transition from work to retirement. There is humour, honesty, enlightenment, encouragement, joy, enthusiasm, excitement and a chance to see retirement through new eyes. A must read for anyone thinking about retirement or who is recently retired.

**Carol Baird-Krull
Enise Olding**

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by Laura Saunders
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Canada has been called a death-denying culture. We tend to choose not to talk to our children and students about death, to protect them from any fear or sadness. Not only do we avoid discussing death in our classrooms, we don't talk about it at all. If teachers talked with students about death as a normal part of life, death would become a normal part of life. We could answer their questions and address their concerns. We could take advantage of teachable moments and incorporate life and death into our general curriculum. We could be proactive, and not be afraid.

This book provides teachers with options for discussing the topic of death and dying with their students in creative and positive ways.

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