

Chapter 20. Reflections

I am no longer involved in time-consuming committees for church or school except for one, a committee to revise and update our church's website that is quite dated now, after six years without much change. In early 2010, I wrote to our Council to express my concern about the website, especially about the time-bound and outdated information on it. Next thing, as I might have expected, I was asked to head up a committee of four to do something about it. After about eight meetings we have been able to update the website—I had to learn some new skills in connection with that—and we have commissioned a local expert to design a new one. It has been an interesting challenge so far, with two young and website-savvy committee members and two elderly types who know more about the church side of things.

Around home, I enjoy doing the things that come with owning a house and yard from which Dixie and I derive comfort and pleasure. Taking care of much of the necessary maintenance of the place gives satisfaction; if there are things that I cannot do or do not want to tackle there are people who will come and do it and we pay them for it. There will almost certainly be a gradual shift to more custom-handling of such maintenance as long as we continue to live in our present house and I am happy to accept that also.

A few times during the last two years a couple of our grandchildren needed help with math or physics, and fortunately I was able to help them with that. I had to learn some new terminology in algebra and trigonometry but the formulas and their logic had not changed from the time of my high school years and I was glad to be able to help them sort things out.

Part of my morning routine most days includes some Bible reading and prayer, usually followed by reading our two daily newspapers and solving the Sudoku puzzle, accompanied by a cup of coffee. Dixie usually sleeps a bit longer than I do; when she gets up I make us some delicious oatmeal porridge, cooked in the microwave with milk and raisins. Dixie will do the Sudoku puzzle also and then, with varying levels of frustration, she will devote her mental energy to a couple of word puzzles in the paper. And, of course, there are magazines to read, e-mail to keep up with, and financial recordkeeping. Ever since I left home to go to university I have kept detailed records of our expenses—and the supporting income, of course. I have developed an efficient computer-based system of dealing with the information and it is not an onerous task.

During the last half dozen years I also have read a large number of books, mostly obtained from the public library but also a few that had been decorating our bookshelves for some time already. Buying and accumulating more books than we already have does not make a lot of sense to us anymore. I keep hearing or reading about books that are of interest, however, and the list of books I want to explore keeps on getting longer rather than shorter. Of reading many books there clearly is no end. Sometimes I feel compelled to tell Dixie about the great things I discover in these books but she does not always want to hear about them. Dixie reads also but her choice of books is not the same as mine.

My interest in photography continues unabated. I don't know what will be the fate of the thousands of slides in my collection but I will lose no sleep over that. Part of my lack of concern about that is something like the response from photographer Freeman Patterson when asked what he was going to do with his huge collection of slides. "What do you mean?", he said, "I have already done it" ["when I made the photographs"]. I have scanned (digitized) all the slides in my collection that seemed to warrant such treatment and the resulting computer-stored image files are fairly well organized and catalogued. The collection of images made with my digital cameras keeps on growing also and is becoming increasingly difficult to manage, especially in terms of remembering what is in the collection and where particular images can be found. My active participation in the camera club keeps on stimulating my photographic imagination and the monthly competition events always call out to me for submitting printed or digital entries.

So, what shall I do with my extra time and energy once this writing project is completed? Clearly, my life has not ended, so there should be more to write as long as life continues. Dixie has suggested that I write her life story but that poses a whole different challenge. I have come to know her quite well over the years but that does not mean that I can crawl inside her mind or memory and commit to paper whatever I find there. We have taken a stab at using a portable tape recorder for a question-and-answer session and then transcribing what was said but that did not yield very satisfying results. More conversation is needed, it seems.

In a book about the retirement phase of life I recently came across what seemed to be an important question to reflect on a little. The question is, "How would I like to be remembered?" or "What would I like to see written in my obituary or on my tombstone when that time comes—as it surely will?"

I have thought about the question but have not come up with any satisfying answers yet. It is easier to list the things for which I do not need to or want to be remembered. Or perhaps the things for which I would be glad to be remembered for a short time only. Those who survive me may well be like the institution (the university where I was employed for many years) that no longer knew me the minute I retired from it. To the institution I clearly was like the flower that fades, and whose place knows it no more. Sure, a number of individual people who worked there with me will remember me for a time but really, the place knows me no more.

I do not need to be remembered for my research and administrative accomplishments but I would like to be remembered by at least some of the students whom I taught over the years, especially the graduate students to whom I was a mentor and teacher and whose research work I supervised. I fully expect that to happen for some time, in the same way that I remember those who mentored and taught and supervised me when I was in a student role.

I would rather be remembered as a God-loving, compassionate, generous, and loving husband, father, and friend. In other words, not for what I may have accomplished during my lifetime, but rather for the person I tried to be. Family members and friends will no doubt remember my faults and shortcomings also but I

do not intend to dwell on those here. They have been and are sufficiently obvious without that.

In the work-for-a-living part of my life I found satisfaction in most of the things I was assigned or asked to do or in the projects I helped initiate. There was never a shortage of challenges that came my way and I found satisfaction in meeting as many of them as I could. Similarly, I have enjoyed serving my wife, my children, and my Christian community with whatever gifts and energy I had.

Recently I read Charles Gordon's book *The Canada Trip*, in which he described the three-month cross-Canada trip—both ways—he and his wife Nancy took in 1997. In the closing pages of the book he wrote about the places they did not visit, the things they did not do, the spur-of-the-moment decisions they made when faced with choices, and the places and things they left for 'the next time'. I do not expect to have another life in which I might do the things I missed out on or chose not to do during the 78-plus years I have had since my birth. Do I have regrets about things I was not able to do, exciting as they might have been? If I have had them in the past, I certainly do not have them now.

A relative once said to Dixie that she thought we had such interesting lives. We were amused by the comment at the time but as I reflect on the past years now, I believe it to be completely true. I am grateful to God for the opportunities to work and serve that I was offered; most of them came my way without me asking for them. I am happy that I was able to walk through the doors that opened for me and that I could make use of so many unexpected opportunities. Dixie's unending love and support in all these things has been wonderful, and I thank God for her.
