

Journey To The End Of The Universe: A Day In The Life Of A Retired Person

After I retired from my 40 year career in engineering in March, 2007, some of my friends asked me to write an account of a typical day I was passing. The following account of the day on Dec. 29, 2010 is in response to that, even though it is a couple of years late.

8:00 A.M.

I have just woken up after nine hours of sleep - much more than what people have, especially at my age. Unfulfilled sleep though was not one of the reasons why I chose to retire but it was a peripheral longing that was met with my decision to retire.

Two cups of tea make my eye-opener. While the eyes are still unfolding my soul is already awake, wanting to listen to music. I start with some Indian classical music and end up with lighter music. I am always under the crush of some music, the melody of which haunts me for weeks, so I have to cater to my music muse.

After music I am afloat on Internet skimming my email, which is followed by reading The New York Times on it also. (My home looks less littered without the print version of it parked at various places for reading since 6 months when I replaced it, after using it for some 40 years, by the electronic version for the weekdays)

9:00 A.M.

By now I start feeling a little impatient about not getting into my writing while my energy is still gushing. Finally, I am looking over an unpublished poem *Two Flowers On The Grave Of An Unknown Poet*. I finished this poem a few days ago but have restrained myself to publish it because I have been producing a lot of poems since retirement, which may be too much for my readers.

Sometimes I am writing more than one thing at a time; they can be articles, essays, poems, and books. Last summer I published the two books *Inclinations And Reality* and *The Light Through The Woods*. Besides these, since retirement, I have written about 60 poems and a few articles and short essays, a sort of a gushing inspired outpouring. I am sometimes concerned if my readers are being over burdened by that, especially by the greater frequency of my poetry, but I cannot shut the creative tap when it is flowing.

I have set up projects for my retirement. They do not include travel and property enhancements, but they have to do with writing and reading. Writing and reading have been the elements of my subconscious since my early boyhood. I do not know why it is so but I know artists have a tendency toward strong inclinations. The predisposition to writing and reading has given me both joys and sorrows.

At my retirement three years ago, I estimated that I have 10 years to live. So, I have planned to read the 100 great books that I have missed. These great books come from literature, philosophy, and science. But I have greater commitment to writing. Ironically, the details of my writing ambition are more nebulous at this point. My autobiographical work *Inclinations And Reality* has left me with no inclination to go into that genre of writing again. Ideas seem to impress me more than experiences.

Much as I value writing and reading, I cannot share my enthusiasm for them with many people. They are not enthusiastic about them, they do not consider them among the great things in life. In fact, some of them think I am wasting my time.

They would have liked me to do some job, even if it meant working in a grocery store. They believe that would keep me busy and give me money, the prime axis of their lives. There are people who would think of money even when they are dying. Lucky is the person who moves in like-minded company. Because of this I have been rendered a loner – almost, throughout my life.

10:30A.M.

Time to feed the body is overdue. My hunger-digestion engine works with flawless efficiency. At breakfast I try to satisfy myself with egg, cereal, and bread. Sometimes, I switch to fruit but that genre continues to frustrate me with its sharp effect on my stomach. I have given up juices for the same reason and also as they feel hypoglycemic. But taking breakfast this late does not preclude my diving for lunch a little later.

11:00 A.M.

I am taking an exercise. I work out on a treadmill at my home about thrice a week, preferring it to going to a sports center or taking walks, which were my previous environments of exercise. My body, luckily, does not need a lot of exercise. Watching news while exercising is a good concomitant use of time. I am at this stage only able to exercise 35 minutes; I wonder if I can make it to 45.

12; 30 P.M.

I am dressed up for going into the outside world. Today I have to look for a table lamp for my study, as its original lighting design has failed due to the excessive build up of heat generated by the halogen-tungsten lamps. Its installing contractor had no idea of the problem of the heat buildup leading to the ballast

turning off automatically or to the premature failure of the lamps. The trip would also give me an opportunity to have a mini lunch.

3:00 P.M.

I am home after the outside trip and am getting eager to finish some of the commercial chores involving billing and the follow up on the home maintenance contractors. The commercial chores never end and their incursion into the prime time of my creative writing is a struggle I have been battling over a long time. The commercial activity cannot be shunted into the evening as the commercial contactors go to their homes by then.

Many times I have to fix things in or out of the home. Doing that excites me as being an engineer challenges my abilities to rise up to the situation to solve the problems. The large house I live in never rests in presenting me with problems. A good part of day gets spent in doing household chores of grocery buying, house cleaning, auto maintenance, etc. I try to avoid social engagements as I have discovered painfully, over a long stretch of my life, that I am not a social person. I like to talk with people on one on one basis, group talk to me is a foolish effort. It is because for most of the people talk and discussion are not for going into the essence of the subject under attention but an opportunity to exercise their lungs, feel a thrill of social intercourse, and display themselves. Because of this, I am often rendered a meditating Buddha amidst the hustle and bustle of a party. My detractors give this as another example of my eccentric personality.

I have a circle of friends from my engineering days who become easy lunch companions. We talk about both the past as well as the present. The cataclysmic changes at my previous employer Wyeth (now called Pfizer) makes us rue at what the time has wrought with our happy fraternity of 3,100 at its Pearl River, New York campus, where I spent 30 years. During summers I regularly play tennis with one of my retiree friends. Golf, the proverbial favorite of the retirees, I was unable to pursue, in spite of my assiduous efforts.

I have not been able to become a bird of passage because of practical family problems. But I hope time will come when I will start travelling to the exotic places in the world I have not been to. I have strong feelings to see beautiful landscapes, historical places, and watch fringe communities. Living in a city for as many years as I have has been a big loss to me. I believe nature to be the bedrock of human life, any breakup with it to be a serious loss. In my financial poverty and many worldly chains that I am captive of, I might have choked the spirit that gives me sustenance. Naturally, I am always dreaming of going to places that bare nature in its highest beauty.

I some days go out to the neighborhood lakes and parks. Often, I take a book with me. It is something the working life would have never allowed. Human beings are struggling to survive but even those who have time available to do so do not know how to relax. These are sins of the Age Of Technology, which has curtailed the mental freedom of man. Last summer I would visit the town pool occasionally. It would give me an opportunity to read while watching kids and people enjoying themselves in and out of the water.

My forays into cooking are still preliminary and tentative, which I intend to cultivate into an exciting and useful hobby.

Every life comes with special protective features from nature for preservation; mine has come, among other things, with capacities to neither feel bored or lonely.

5;30 P.M.

It is almost the time I would be home when I was working. The two realms, working and retirement, are very different and yet they are both about the same thing, life. While regular professional work focuses life on the particular and

immediate aspects of life, retirement frees one from those shackles and opens up vistas of imagination. Not everyone can have an enjoyable retirement, as programming of the routine of life and certain emotional and social connections settle deeply in mind, preventing change.

Most of the day is over and my thoughts go to the evening. Evening is a very special time of the 24 hour day cycle when dreamy exuberance of man is awakened. Care should be taken how one spends an evening, as it casts a shadow on one's life. Keeping that in mind, I usually do nothing, which permits my dreaming self to be free. Wine usually keeps me company.

After dinner I am back into my cell, my study, where I pick up the threads of my thoughts. Later, after dispensing with the new emails, I often read. A sheath of unread books borders the room. These days I am reading Stephan Hawkings' *The Grand Design* and Phillip Roth's *The Humbling*. Occasionally, I excursion into TV.

Throughout the day, no matter what I am doing, I am preoccupied with certain thoughts, giving me an appearance, at times, of inattentiveness and mild moronity. Because of this I am also thought to be insensitive and arrogant in some circles. My thoughts are difficult to describe in a short space. Suffice it say that they are about human life, though not much about my own life. These are ideas about what human values are, their origin, their present content and significance. But basically I am through with the search of values for myself. Then there are thoughts about the origin and progress of science and its limitation in helping human beings in finding happiness. I get into what human life would be like a hundred and a thousand years from now. I think about the themes of my future poems and other writings.

I would like to write a book on the mind of Albert Einstein, one of the heroes of my life. There have been several excellent books on his work but none which has been good exploring the architecture of his mind. I seem to have ideas on that not

dwelt on by others so far. But this project is still an idea in my mind, the first floor of a multi-storied house. It is quite possible that I may never undertake this project. At this stage of my life it will not break my heart if I did that, as what is significant now is capturing the essence of things, their worldly manifestation taking a second place.

More real than the above indicated project is the project to write an article on the Kashmir problem. I have already written some ten articles and seven poems on Kashmir but Kashmir is an eternal element of my soul, so I return to it often. Just a few weeks ago I finished writing the article *The Impasse Over Kashmir*. Now I am going to write *To Be Or Not To Be: Kashmir Problem And Jawaharlal Nehru*. This is because the Kashmir problem has again raised its ugly and excruciating head. I have done the basic legwork on the article, what remains now is weaving it in words.

I often travel back to my past to look at some of the treasures of my life. I have tried to preserve my past like one preserves things in a museum. Things are lined up according to subject, significance, and time. Some weeks I am in Kashmir, other weeks I am in New Delhi, and some other weeks in early years of New York. It is not an inexhaustible museum but the journey through it is unending. Our past hangs in our lives like a dream that has not yet finished.

I am happy that I retired, as life had started to lose its romantic appeal, charm, and freshness for me. If I cannot feel excited to look at sky and trees, feel seduced into day-dreaming, feel joy about planning the next piece of writing that I want to write, and look forward to reading a book then there is no life for me. I fought fierce battles with the world to obtain my retirement. Here it is now, all mine, to feel the possibilities of the pulse of life: the excitement of imagination and the shimmering delight of journeying toward the end of the universe.

10:30 P.M.

By 10:00 P.M. I begin to feel the gentle pressure of sleep enveloping me. By 10:30 I am within the covers of my bed, ready to embark on the fascinating journey of sleep. Even on the nights when the Lady Sleep is not too friendly, I manage to have overall a pleasant cruise. Without the outlet of sleep life for me would become joyless.

I am committed to live the full natural course of my life, in spite of the many difficulties I have faced in my life. This commitment to live no matter how difficult it might get is irrational but because it is there you may call it my religion. I want to journey to the end of the universe; by that I mean to explore the frontiers of mind, as far as possible, in the fields of science, literature, and philosophy. It is amazing that how nature has crammed within the three pounds of human brain an incredible facility to comprehend. As Einstein said, "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible."

I believe I was sent here to find some things and it seems that that mission has been completed. Now I am walking toward the boundary between the ephemeral and the eternal. What a journey it has been.

A day has passed in my life; I am poised with hope and purpose to live another one.

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