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Staying Engaged After Retirement: History as a Focal Point

Roger Hiemstra, Professor Emeritus, Syracuse University

I retired from Syracuse University in May 1997, at age 59 after 17 years of full-time university work there. I also had been a professor at the University of Nebraska from 1970-76 and at Iowa State University from 1976-80. At SU I was a professor, researcher, department chair, and project director. I had not planned to retire that young as I really enjoyed being a full-time academic, but when Syracuse University went through one of its periodic financial difficulties and offered a lucrative (one year of academic salary, emeritus status, and health benefits until age 70) buy-out option for senior faculty, it looked very attractive. My wife, Janet, and I talked first with our financial planner and then, as both our children were through college, we were debt-free except for a reasonable house mortgage, we had reasonable savings including decent retirement annuities, and we could think of attractive things to do, I took the option.

I was able to almost immediately secure some part-time adjunct teaching in another college (Elmira College), most of it involving online instruction. This freed me to do some writing, consulting, and enjoying a somewhat slower pace while waiting three years for Janet to retire. Then in 2000 we purchased a motorhome and began following a dream of exploring the U.S. and its many national and state parks. We traveled about three months out of the year, visited every state except for one, caught up with old friends scattered near and far, and I was able to teach two to three weekend or summer concentrated face-to-face graduate courses in adult education annually. I also taught one to two online courses each semester during our travel times.

We had a wonderful eight years doing this, but when our first grandchild was born in 2008, we altered that life style, sold our motorhome, and have spent several weeks each year since then visiting our two children and their now four children. We also managed to do a little bit of international travel. I still continued to do some face-to-face and online teaching up until May of 2014, most of that for a nearby college (Le Moyne College) with a master's degree concentration in adult education.

Being a high-energy individual, though, I knew that what I described above was not enough to keep me intellectually and spiritually stimulated. In essence I was looking for something that added meaning to my life. During the time I was a professor at Syracuse University, I directed a funded project that involved promoting the awareness and use of archival adult education material housed at the university (<http://roghiemstra.com/kelrpt1.html>). I also wrote several articles during my career that involved an historical look at the field, taught a graduate course each year that included content on the history of the field, and supervised several dissertations that included some focus on history.

This foray into the history of our field dovetailed nicely with the long interest I had maintained in genealogy. I had served as family genealogist for the "Hiemstra" name since I took an adult education course in genealogy at the local community college during my first year at the University of Nebraska. I eventually developed some information on my family that was shared with family members. I continued developing that information through interviews with family, the gathering of written and pictorial information, and a few trips to the Netherlands. The

information was eventually placed on the Internet so relatives far and wide could benefit from my efforts (<http://roghiemstra.com/dutch.html>).

Thus, in 2004 when the president of our church asked me if I would take on the responsibility of serving as the church historian (a position that had been vacant for several years), I agreed. For 10 years I did various things to promote interest in church history resulting in church services (e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTDokLwrOgg>), periodic history-oriented displays in church, training others on preserving and promoting church history (<http://roghiemstra.com/churchhistory.html>), a monthly history column in our church newsletter, a couple of history-related web pages (<http://roghiemstra.com/indexnew.html> and <http://roghiemstra.com/sjmay.html>), and a book (Hiemstra, R. 2015. *May Memorial's Historical Tree of Life*. Syracuse, NY: May Memorial Unitarian Universalist Society).

In the fall of 2010 I began several years as a volunteer in my local library. I built an archival database for and helped enter in the related information regarding more than 35,000 individual pieces of sheet music maintained by the library. This database facilitates the collection's archivist as she searches for and obtains any sheet music requested by users from around the world.

During the summer of 2014 I began organizing information for a personal memoir I hope to write over the next two years. I had kept a variety of information, including considerable correspondence, related to my life, family, and career from young adulthood to the present. I also had collected personal information from my Mother and other relatives related to my childhood and subsequent years forward to the present. However, I had never taken the time to really assess what I possessed but simply stored the material in several boxes in several locations. During that summer I looked through everything, eliminated duplicative material, sequenced it all by date, and placed everything in individual manila folders. I then scanned everything that I could as back-up information. I now have five banker boxes all in one location plus an index stored on my computer. I also had maintained a daily journal since the summer of 1991. All of this information should give me considerable help as I begin outlining what a personal memoir might contain.

In the fall of 2015 I joined the local fire department as a fire corps member, which means I undertake various administrative duties. My main focus now is helping to write an updated history of the department. I have interviewed several retired department members and have helped in the development of some future historical displays both within the station itself and potentially to be posted on the department's web page.

In essence, my long time interest in history and family genealogy has been enriched through the various history-related activities in which I have engaged since my retirement from full-time employment. I believe the intellectual and spiritual stimulation I sought was found.

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