

Reflections on the last two years – and a chance to reinvent myself

Geoff Hastings

I don't know whether my retirement is typical or atypical. I suspect that it's a bit like childbirth in that everyone wants to tell you about the experience they had but there is limited relevance in extrapolating from the individual to the general. Anyway here goes for what it's worth.

I was Principal at Bathurst High, a large high school in a regional city that had grown to be over 1000 students by the time I finished my eleven year tenure there at the end of 2016. I was on the old super scheme and as a result my 60th birthday was a line in the sand. In fact I turned sixty early in term 4 but decided I would do the 'right thing' and go to the end of the year, even though I worked out that I was working hard for a net income that was slightly in the minus.

This turned out to be a good thing because I realised that working for nothing was rubbish. Three years out from the end of my tenure I would have given you a completely different take on how I thought about my job – the idea that passion for the job was enough etc – but my last ten weeks at school certainly confirmed that I was ready for something else.

One of the things I had decided about 12 months out from 'the finish' is that I wouldn't call it a 'retirement'. I called it a chance to 'reinvent myself' when speaking to others and myself. I don't know for sure, but I think that phrase reinforced my mindset that finishing was an opportunity, not something to worry about.

A piece of really excellent advice I got from a respected colleague who had gone through the process a few years before me had resonated with me, and I enacted that in my last 12 months. His advice was to leverage my title and profile in the community while still working to look for opportunities post full-time work, because once I lost the position, my 'street cred' would drop off quickly and the community would move on in no time at all.

So out of all that, in my own eyes (which are the ones that count), I have reinvented myself extremely successfully. Being asked onto the Board of Directors of some significant not-for-profit organisations has allowed me to make a contribution in worthwhile areas without over-committing myself. I applied for my current Director of Professional Learning position with SPC while still an active principal and that also became part of the reinventing process.

I was always pretty fit and played team sports (mainly soccer) until my early fifties, but as the body got slower I discovered (oh no!) *pushbike riding*. So since finishing full-time work I have set another goal as part



On the road in Sardinia

of my reinvention – to be as fit as possible and follow the mantra of ‘use it or lose it’ physically. Being one of the lycra brigade has led to an extensive social network outside of the education community (reinvention!), loss of quite a deal of unnecessary weight (18kgs – you should try dragging that dead mass up a hill), a competitive outlet (against myself) and a whole new travel experience.

On the last point I am fortunate to have a partner who also rides – in fact she got me into it originally – and we often go on bike riding holidays. We have ridden:

1. From Turin (Italy) to Paris. That was about 1100kms and our first big ride. It really gave us a taste for it.
2. Through the Croatian Islands and along the Croatian west coast on a bike and in boats.
3. Up some of the iconic Toure de France and Giro d’Italia climbs such as the Stelvio Pass, Garvia, Alpe d’Huez and Col du Galibier.
4. Through Corsica, Sardinia and Sicily – which was about 1500kms.
5. Our latest trip was to Ireland where we cycled from the very southern tip to the very northern tip along the west coast - about 800kms .
6. And other places in shorter stints.



On the road in Ireland

I love bike holidays. The combination of physicality and being so embedded in the landscape is completely different to more traditional holidays that involve getting from point A to B by some form of enclosed transport. You can also cover a fair bit of territory on a bike which makes it a bit different to walking. One of the great advantages is that you can eat and drink what you like because you will burn off any calories so a breakfast, lunch, second lunch, pre-dinner munchies and dinner of local specialities is not a problem. Of course it also has to be helped along with local wine. I have added a couple of photos. One photo of the Stelvio which is just spectacular and a tough 24km climb topping out at a little over 2,700m and with 44 switchbacks. The second is from Sardinia and the third from Ireland.

Remember that if you don’t think that you could manage bike trips there are things called ebikes that do all the riding for you. Think about it even if it’s a tour of London by night of 10kms length. We do those as well.

So I have set myself physical goals and kept ‘working’ but on my terms. The transition was easier than I thought it would be. I no longer wake up at 3 a.m. with a million issues going through my head and I can’t even work out how I managed my pre-reinvention life.



On the road in Italy – the Stelvio Pass

I think that the individual nature of this process limits the value of my experience but for what it is worth, that is my reinvention so far.

Oh, if anyone is keen on bike riding and is travelling near Bathurst give me a ring or txt. I love hopping out with people and we have lots and lots of bike rides of various distances and difficulties with no traffic lights, ending in a mandatory coffee shop visit. Bathurst has an outstanding coffee culture with more cafes and outlets than is reasonable.

Contributor details

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Geoff was Principal of Denison College Bathurst High Campus from 2006-2017. Since finishing with DoE he has been developing the SPC's professional learning portfolio and profile as the Director of Professional Learning and mixing this with his cycling hobby and all its iterations. He is a Life Member of the SPC and was a member of the SPC executive from 2011 to 2015.