

Reflections on retirement five years on

Suzan Dickson

In the few years leading up to my retirement at the end of 2014, I decided I should consider the coming change a little more seriously than I had so far. I attended superannuation information sessions and the Department's planning for retirement course, searched online for practical tips and talked with my partner and family. Then I began some semi-planning, using my research as a checklist.

- Finances? Luckily, both my partner and I were in the old super scheme. Maybe it's time for some more in-depth discussions with the super people though?
- Where to live? Sydney? Coast? Country? Or what about overseas? That last idea definitely had appeal.
- Casual teaching? Hmmm, this required some thought because, after all, I hadn't been in the classroom for some years.
- Part-time work? This sounded like a good idea to help the transition from full-time, full-on work to full-time retirement and, after all, as any Principal can attest, most of us can turn our hand to just about any organisational, administrative, statistical, time and human resource management activity required of us.
- Volunteering? Something to investigate after part-time work.
- Hobbies? Not much time for hobbies when working and travelling the four hours to and from Sydney every few weekends. Something to think about.
- Travel? Definitely!

And the more practical planning:

- Update my will
- Organise an enduring power of attorney
- Buy a new car as the current one was a bit of a lemon, despite the three-pointed star on the bonnet.

Then came time to put my somewhat vague ideas into practice. I spoke to the super people, took TAFE's online Certificate III Business course to formalise the skills I had developed in my 38 years of teaching and administration in schools, TAFE and university, and decided to live in the regional city I'd spent a good deal of my life in. I still had friends there, along with an extensive network of people I had known from childhood and teaching. I sold the Federation house I'd lived in for 32 years and, with my partner, built a modern home on a slightly smaller block of land on the outskirts of town. And I applied for casual teaching (just in case).

When my children voiced their concerns that I would be bored in retirement, I reassured them that I would find ample to keep me busy and fulfilled. In fact, after a working life of being at others' beck and call, I was looking forward to having the freedom to do what I wanted when I wanted.

Retirement came at the end of the 2014 school year and I celebrated the fact that I would spend a lot less time (and money) travelling both to and from school and to and from my home town. In the first full year of retirement, I bought that new car. I put the finishing touches to the new house and spent a lot of time in the garden. I began researching family trees – and became addicted. I revelled in going to the gym at a reasonable hour, taking walks during the day instead of very early morning, sitting in the sun while relaxing over morning coffee, reading novels rather than writing reports, making appointments during the day instead of after 4.30pm. I decided against casual teaching. After all, the syllabus had changed, and did I really want to re-establish my classroom credentials with Year 7 and 8 students? Instead, I caught up with friends and applied for part time administrative positions with local businesses. In short, I relaxed but with the knowledge that I would soon put my newly certified skills to work.

However, local businesses didn't value my experience as much as I had anticipated – or maybe it was my age. In fact, my many applications were not even acknowledged. With that door closed, I began volunteering in the local Cancer Council office once a week (where my boss is an ex-student who values and utilises my knowledge and experience), in a friend's wellbeing business and, more recently, with our new local regional museum. I was invited to write a subject for a local university's Masters' degree in Business Leadership – and then offered assignment marking, both of which I enjoyed.

My partner and I travelled overseas and within Australia, something we hadn't been able to do whilst working and dividing our time between Sydney and our regional home. In England I was able to catch up with cousins I hadn't seen for 50 years and meet second cousins I'd never met – very handy for filling in gaps in the family tree.

When grandchildren came along, we were delighted to be able to spend time with them as well as help out their parents, though this entails two days of travel for one family and four hours for another. I recently began researching the finer details of my mother's family and am writing their story for my aunt, my mother's only surviving sibling. I've just been asked to organise a friend's family documents and photos and create a written history of her family. In addition, I'm refining a local history monograph I began some years ago and I write articles and create quizzes for a family travel magazine. In short, I'm busy and reasonably productive, but.....

I think it's time for some new challenges. I have lots of ideas – and I'll let you know what happens in a few years' time.

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Suzan was Principal of the Open High School (now NSW School of Languages) from 2011–2014. Since retirement, she divides her time between her regional NSW home, Sydney and the Gold Coast in order to keep up with family. She enjoys travelling, volunteering with a number of organisations, and researching and writing local and family histories.