

# Whose Retirement?

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The great baseball pitcher Leroy (Satchel) Paige once said, "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you." Despite his good advice, I have been casting wary glances over my shoulder at the approach of my retirement from teaching. I must now report that it's gaining on me and it looks as though it is going to catch up with me soon.

So I have developed a retirement Rorschach. Faithful readers (possibly as many as two or three in number) who are addicted to *One Way of Looking at It* will recall my sabbatical Rorschach, which was reported several years ago in this column. Since the rest of you obviously have no recollection at all of this scientific breakthrough, I'll describe it for you.

My sabbatical Rorschach was administered through a question, "What would you do if you had a sabbatical--perhaps a half year free at your present salary or a full year free at half or three-fourths of your present salary?" Though originally intended by me as a way of seeking advice on my own forthcoming sabbatical, the question led people to drop their masks, share their dreams, and reveal their own personalities in the process. Some said they would take to the woods and shun mankind; others would write the Great American Novel; some would begin an entirely new profession or occupation; others would read and read and read. Most, however, would travel to a fantastic variety of locales via an assortment of vehicles. (Me? I thought you would never ask! I traveled around the world, alternately lecturing and relaxing. Would you like to see my slides sometime? How about now?)

The retirement Rorschach I have developed is even simpler to apply. I simply say to people, "I am going to retire from teaching soon." Then I wait. So far all subjects in this experiment have begun their responses by saying, "I'll tell you what I'd do if I happened to be in your place (shoes, situation)." After talking about what they would do, a few remembered to ask me what I am going to do.

As a good scholar, I have divided my subjects' responses into several emerging categories. First there is the Not a Damn Thing school of thought. With evident relish, manifested by much licking of chops, the informants of this persuasion tell me that they intend to sit in rockers on the porch. Then, after a year or two has gone by, they intend to start rocking.

Next are the proponents of Pellet Pursuit. They tell me of the joys of the greens underfoot in balmy climes as the sun sinks slowly toward the horizon and as the little white sphere is stroked from hole to hole.

Then there is the Better Homes and Gardens school. The practitioners apparently are farmers, tree surgeons, carpenters, plumbers, or other agriculturalists and building trade workers who have been diverted temporarily from their true vocation by almost half a century of teaching.

Finally, there are the Caped Crusaders. Now that there are no superiors to raise the devil with them about their being naughtily "controversial" people who "embarrass the system through unprofessional utterances," they happily write angry letters to the newspapers, join unorthodox committees and movements, and generally thumb their aging noses at the Establishment. Emancipation from economic thralldom has accompanied their social security checks.

There is also an interesting deviant response to my Rorschach gambit, "I am going to retire from teaching soon." On hearing the comment, the respondent registers alarm, looks about in a conspiratorial way to determine if I have been overheard, and then agitatedly whispers, "Don't tell anybody!" The investigator inquires, "Why?" "Because the moment you tell anybody, you'll be a lame duck. You'll lose all your influence; no one will pay any attention to you anymore."

I found this an intriguing theory. So I carefully did not tell my colleagues about my forthcoming retirement from teaching. Meanwhile, I studied their reactions to me. Then I told them. Again, for a period of time, I studied their reactions to me. As in many empirical doctoral dissertations, the results were bland and noncommittal. My colleagues paid exactly as much and exactly as little attention to me as they had before.

From the above experiment you can see that there is one weakness in this retirement Rorschach. In a good Rorschach, only the subjects are supposed to become involved. But in my retirement Rorschach the administrator of the instrument begins to become involved too after a while. He finds himself thinking about whether he has made any difference in human beings and in his world through his teaching. He asks himself what he has been doing that was worth doing and what he has been doing that simply didn't matter. He becomes philosophic and looks for some generalizations about his experiences as an educator. He even begins to see himself as a part of history--a small part, yet a part. Naturally, people hide when they see him coming down the corridor.

Still, the closing moments of application of the retirement Rorschach are sometimes satisfying. After the subjects have fully discussed what they would do if they were in your place/shoes/situation, a few do ask, "And what are you going to do?" This gives the administrator of the retirement Rorschach the opportunity to talk on and on.

Listening with my third ear, did I hear some reader ask me, "What are you going to do?" Shucks, you don't want to hear about li'l ol' me. Well, what I'm going to do is to keep right on with my writing and after my 1978 book I'm going to do an anthology on. . . . I'll continue consulting and speaking too, and let me tell you my idea about taking my Writing for Educational Publications course on the road.... As to working with educational and community organizations, I think I'll.... And I never visited the Grecian islands of the Aegean Sea or cruised to Alaska so I'll ....

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