

This article is one of four reflections on retirement written by former AALL member Jean Holcomb, the retired director of King County Law Library, Seattle, WA. Her articles were originally posted on the blog of the Virginia Association of Law Libraries (VAL). She has given the Encore Caucus permission to post them on our webpage.

## A Life in Retirement: My View

By Jean Holcomb

If graded on a work-life balance, my pre-retirement score would have reflected a tendency to tip toward the work side of the scale. In retirement, I've worked hard to acquire the needed skills to live in the moment. No longer focused on anticipating challenges to the library's funding sources or space allocation in the courthouse, I've tried to design a life that contains elements of what made me happy at work while leaving behind the stressors that managing a public law library bring.

If a retiree's new job is to build a happy life, what elements should be a part of the plan to create such a life? How do you measure success now that you're no longer involved in a formal performance review process? What are your goals? How often should you review your progress?

The old adage that "old age is not for 'sissies,'" no matter what number we assign to old age, rings true for a reason. Leading a happy life after work requires much of the same skill development and determination that we applied to our law library careers.

To begin the task of designing a fulfilling life, I spent time reflecting about the parts of my work life that I would miss the most. I realized that the list of things I liked about my job was a pretty extensive one. At the top of my list was idea generation: the excitement of coming up with an idea. I loved the collaborative process involved in turning that idea into reality. The sense of mission fulfillment project management brought fed personal satisfaction. I loved being involved with something bigger than me: the sense that my contribution helped move a project or a more intangible goal to completion.

In looking for common threads, I came to realize that happiness for me rested on two basic elements; learning something new and sharing the experience with others. To design a post-career life, I would need to find ways to be an active learner. Maintaining my existing network of friends and expanding this network to match my changing interests would be vital.

I did little formal planning about what the structure of my everyday life would be like in advance of leaving the library. I knew that not having a rigid schedule would be central to my design. I wanted the flexibility to take a rainy day, or even a sunny day, to settle down with a good book without feeling that I had to or should be doing something more important.

To chase away the blues brought on by gloomy Seattle days, I had spent time daily on my Nordic track. I learned that exercise and time for reflective thinking went hand in hand for me. Living out in the country with a husband with a serious green thumb and 36 acres to plant, water and harvest gave me all of the fine weather outdoor exercise I wanted. Becoming the gardener's assistant gave me the opportunity to learn about what could grow and how to keep what I planted alive. After taking a yoga class on a vacation with a friend, I found that our county YMCA offered not only daily yoga classes, but an indoor walking track, and opportunities to make new friends.

In part to satisfy my need to collaborate, I found that friends and family enjoyed having me put my research skills to use to plan vacations. Collaboration also plays a role in my newest interest. While Seattle is famous as a “foodie” city, the same cannot be said about my new neighborhood. Driving into Winston Salem for dinner dodging deer and other nighttime critters didn’t prove to be a very satisfying option for a fine dining experience.

To up my culinary skills, I started buying more food focused magazines. My daughter, who had long shared with me a love of baking zillion calorie goodies, and I took a week-long cooking class at the John C. Campbell Folk School in far western North Carolina. In our California cuisine class we learned techniques and methods for a healthy lifestyle. We’ve been back twice to learn more. We’re now collaborating on a cookbook for which I’ve mastered a data management tool, a skill I never envisioned needing or learning.

As a library manager, the annual performance review process was a highlight of my year. Because the ground rules we established as a staff rested on the principle that there would be no “bad news” surprises at the time of the annual review, the annual review focus rested on an evaluation of what had gone right during the past year. Discussion of work habit issues occurred at the point of awareness not at the end of the year. The annual review offered an opportunity to discuss not only goals for the year ahead, but consideration of what resources needed to be made available to support goal setting.

Because we always held our performance reviews in the library in May away from the pressures that occurred during the end of the calendar budget adoption process, I have continued that schedule for my life in retirement. Rather than think about what I want to accomplish in the year ahead in the New Year’s resolution timeframe. I set aside time to reflect and set goals for myself in the spring. Because I’ve made an effort to deal with my own work habit issues like avoiding procrastination with writing deadlines, I’m pretty sure of a good review!

If there’s a moral to my story or a theme to these articles, it’s that the skills you worked so hard to acquire in your library career will continue to be of use to you in retirement. While you might not aspire to bake the world’s best triple chocolate cake, I’m confident that you’ll find something equally satisfying when you leave your library for retirement.