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Retirement

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Retirement

Mary Dengler

Ambiguous term for age-related, health-related end of work, it covers “leave a workplace,” euphemism for what could be said—”Time to leave the office, quit the race, settle into obsolescence inch by inch, wait to join the dead.” Who doesn’t hear those words behind “Congratulations on retiring. You have earned the long vacation. Think of all the new adventures, roads around the bend. And just what ARE your plans?” as if you’d just been born again. It’s not like graduation day, when distant vistas beckoned all your expertise. It’s more like travel to an unknown land, whose mysteries challenge any enterprise. While some count days to freedom, others see a shadowy caravan.

And what about those first few weeks when grades are finished, celebrations end, your boxes full of books and papers bend the hall? What’s going through the mind? “Where do I start? This isn’t like the day I left my home behind in tears or is it? Do I visit friends I put on hold, complete the promised book, attempt to mend the broken world, arrange the twenty years ahead, investigate insurance and investment options, lawyers for a will, or make a fast trip out of town to chill my fears, or find another way to earn my daily bread in case I live beyond my means like street-tent sages?

But then, by habit, I pull on my jeans, open up another book and skim its pages, write another line, shred another bowl of greens, brew another cup, watch another stick of lightening open up the sky.