

THE GIFT OF NEVERENDING WORK

We all have our work. Part of mine is defined by the relevant sections of your Lathrop Resident Agreement. Within some subsection lies my deeper task of asking the deep questions of what is needed and what is wanted. I suggest the answers are found in the ongoing quest for wellness - balance and fulfillment in the various aspects of our lives. For months I have wanted to share thoughts on what the model calls **vocational wellness**. What Buddhists might call **Right Livelihood**. Either way it's an interesting topic for a community of retired people...

The story from the Book of Genesis tells us that cast from paradise we were sentenced to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. One could say that it is work and the opportunities it creates that carve our path in life. And for many of us, for better or worse, it is our work upon which we build our identity. What does that mean in your phase of life? In my years in homecare I concluded that my role was to help my patients identify their work, which ultimately was to understand and practice those behaviors that would allow them to stay in their homes, given what for them were new limitations. For my Waldorf students and my own children the task was ultimately the same: help them become the designer, the builder and the inhabitant of the house that is their life. I am blessed at Lathrop to work within a community where it is assumed that people strive to stay engaged, to be plugged in, and to be doing what they can to keep crafting their story.

What does that mean for seniors, and for seniors here? The Kendal values statement says: We envision the full impact of our work as the transformation of our culture's view of aging, of older persons, and of the potential for fulfillment and continuing contribution during the later stages of life. I quote Dr. Barry Schwartz from Swarthmore (NY Times 8/30/15), "we want work that is meaningful-that makes a difference to other people and thus ennoble us in at least some small way." As we age and leave our careers and roles as pater/materfamilias behind, how do we find work that is meaningful? For I would suggest that when we stop working that is when we start letting go. Finding meaning is of course always up to us. In community of course there is always the need to attend to the governance of the community, yes that is committees, but also suggesting and volunteering for events. In addition we have neighbors and friends to care about, to help them see and be seen as productive and engaged. When I hear residents talk about what Lathrop is or is not doing on some subject, I wonder beyond asking the question (sometimes courageous work unto itself) what is the resident herself doing about it. How does each of us contribute in a meaningful way to our life here together? And beyond the curbs of Lathrop there are countless ways to give and receive value as so many do as volunteers.

Now without letting the focus become too narrow in the privacy of our independent lives, it is of course work to ask ourselves the hard questions: how do I want these chapters to play out, what's likely given the body I'm in and the life I've lead, how have I gathered together the threads of my life and expressed my wishes (and fears) to those who are prepared to help? Have I decided what's most important, and am I reaching for it? We can't of course guarantee that the script we write will be played out, but write it we must. That's engagement and that is work. The paychecks may stop but with grace the work never will.

