

Solitude doesn't mean lonely

By Ellen Waldman

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I'm just returning from a monthlong sabbatical. Now, this is an interesting word, and one I might not have used to describe my time off work, until I did a bit more research.

According to the dictionary, it generally refers to a period of paid leave granted to a university teacher or other worker for study or travel. More relevant for me is this definition: A sabbatical is an extended period of time away from work.

After providing services through my business, Senior Options, since 2000, and writing Aging Happens since 2014, it was time to plan a break by myself, in solitude. Good to note that while in solitude, I did not feel lonely or isolated.

Solitude is not the same as isolation. Here's a report, "A Study of Solitude: How Middle-Aged and Older Adults Experience Solitude," by Janis Sayer, March 27, 2020. Solitude is defined by the absence of social interaction with others, but others can be nearby. The study found that participants reported that they were in solitude often. Participating in passive leisure activity (such as reading or relaxing) was associated with increased levels of feeling calm or satisfied. Participants who wanted more solitude tended to feel less lonely than others.

Back to being on sabbatical. What you focus on during a sabbatical depends on where you are in your stage of life. Some people take time to enhance their area of expertise, or travel to learn about other cultures. But what are you taking a sabbatical from if you're already retired from your work life?

Here's a surprising quote from Modern Elder Academy (modernelderacademy.com) founder, Chip Conley: "I think the time you need a sabbatical most is in retirement, when you might be falling into habits that don't necessarily serve you — whether it's watching too much TV or gossiping or playing bingo. Think of a sabbatical as an opportunity to try something new. After all, curiosity is the elixir of life. Openness to new experiences is correlated to living a longer, happier life."

Modern Elder Academy describes itself as the world's first "midlife wisdom school" dedicated to long-life learning.

Lifelong learning also can happen right here in the Rogue Valley. If you haven't taken a sabbatical this summer, it's not too late. You might already be familiar with OLLI at SOU, (<https://inside.sou.edu/olli/index.html>; olli@sou.edu; 541-552-6048), and its wide array of 100 or more classes in each session.

OLLI membership costs just \$150 for the full school year, September through June. I will be one of the many presenters for the class "Plan4Care: The Sequel." Be curious, check out the catalog and learn about something new.

Also in the category of trying something new, you might consider volunteering with kids in their schools. After the pandemic, when the schools first reopened, no volunteers were permitted in the classrooms.

But now, if you call the schools closest to where you live, you might find that they're thrilled for your participation. Nothing like being around children to lighten the heart and be mutually beneficial.

In the same spirit of new ideas, and after writing these 174 columns, there might still be some topics that you would like to read about. Please send me an email (edw@ashlandhome.net) with your ideas or questions about issues that engage your curiosity. If I don't have the information at hand, I'll find the experts who do. That way, we can expand our base of knowledge together as we continue to grow and learn. Whether in solitude, on a sabbatical or most any time at all, it's always good to continue our lifelong learning.