

INTRODUCTION

On the first day of the rest of my life, I rolled over and went back to sleep.

For forty-three years, four months, and seventeen days, but who's counting, I had set the alarm for an ungodly hour, which was so early that even God wasn't up. Then I would stagger into the office, mumble "good morning" to no one in particular, because no one in particular would listen to me, plop my posterior into a worn-out chair, and roll over and go back to sleep at my desk.

Now that I am retired, I don't have to get out of bed to do the same thing.

One of the best things about being retired is that you don't have to wear pants every day. If you try that at work, you will end up being unemployed, but without a buyout. What you will receive is a get-out: No severance, just leave. And don't let the door hit you in the boxer shorts on the way out.

The buyout, which came with a generous package that did not, unfortunately, include beer, was a surprise to me and my colleagues, many of whom are fellow baby boomers who had been go-getters in their day (mine was March 30, 1976, when I began my career) but who had grown weary of the daily grind.

As an army of anxious employees crammed into the auditorium, the stunning announcement was made: The company was offering buyouts.

Naturally, there were questions:

How much would we get? Could we apply for unemployment? What would happen with our 401(k)s?

I raised my hand.

"If someone is injured sprinting to the human resources department to apply for a buyout," I asked, "would it be covered under our medical plan?"

Everybody laughed. Nobody answered.

When the meeting was over, I texted my wife, Sue, with one word: "BUYOUT!"

Eight seconds later, she replied: "How much?"

It was enough for me to sprint to the human resources department to apply.

Three weeks later, I was without a job.

It raised an important question: How could I stop working when I never really started? Also, what would I do with myself? What would Sue do with me? Would I become so fantastically annoying that I'd have to work part time as a stock boy in a grocery store just to get out of the house?

The answers were easy: My job may have ended, but my career hasn't. For twenty-two years, I was an editor at Newsday. For all of that time and for the previous twenty-one years, I was a writer for my hometown paper, the Stamford Advocate, including more than three decades as a columnist whose work, I am proud to say, has no redeeming social value.

I quit the editing and staggering into the office but not the rest.

From home, I have continued to write my nationally syndicated humor column for Hearst Connecticut Media Group and Tribune News Service of Chicago. I have written this book, my fifth. Like the first four, it's a crime against literature. And I am writing a sitcom based on my work. If you think TV is bad now, wait until my show gets on the air.

I had long said that I could do a lot of work if I didn't have to go to work. Now I don't. And I am working harder — and more happily — than ever.

But my most important job involves my grandchildren, Chloe, Lilly, Xavier, Zoe, and Quinn. They range in age from seven to one. And they're all more mature than I am.

You have to wonder who babysits whom.

Chloe and Lilly, the daughters of our younger daughter, Lauren, and her husband, Guillaume, live about forty-five minutes from our house on Long Island, New York.

Xavier, Zoe, and Quinn are the children of our older daughter, Katie, and her husband, Dave. They also live about forty-five minutes away (by plane) in Washington, D.C.

Grandkids are a big part of retirement. So are spouses. Sue and I have been married for forty-two years. If it weren't for her, I would be either dead or in prison. She's the backbone of the family, my soulmate, a woman who, for putting up with me for so long, deserves to be the first living person canonized by the Catholic Church. I deserve to be shot from a cannon.

Sue has been a teacher's assistant for three decades. Working with children is the highest calling. It's the world's most important job — except, of course, for being my doctor.

Sue keeps busy by keeping me busy.

"I am making a to-do list for you," she often says.

I don't make a big to-do out of it. I just do it. Marriage, after all, is dear season: "Yes, dear."

That goes especially for retirement.

But life is good, as it has always been. It's different now, but even better.

You will read a lot more about it in the rest of this book, which contains absolutely true stories about real people, not just family members but friends, former co-workers, and even complete strangers.

Of course, all of these retirement chores can really tire a guy out. So please excuse me while I roll over and go back to sleep.

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