



My Thoughts on Retirement

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The founders of the Trust wanted to preserve the historic fabric of Idaho for the Bicentennial in 2090 as a lasting gift to the people of Idaho. The Centennial Legislature agreed that this was an important thing to do. So the gift of fifty cents per license plate sold in Idaho is made in the name of the people of Idaho to the Trust endowment. And the earnings off this endowment serve to help communities preserve the tangible remnants of Idaho's past.

I agree with the founders but this whole business has been about finding home for me. I guess that's why I've been running around Idaho for the past thirty odd years under the flag of politics, art and history. I would have said that years ago but the trustees of the Idaho Heritage Trust didn't hire me to be a poet. They hired me to find out if the people of Idaho wanted to preserve historic buildings, sites and artifacts. And to help them get the job done if that was what was needed. And for the past eighteen years that's what I've been doing in every county in the state. But secretly I've searching for the elusive mystery of home. And the trick is that I've found it stored in the buildings, artifacts and sites and the people who work to preserve them. These places hold stories and the stories, like the buildings, are rich in layer after layer of texture and complexity in a way that only weathered siding, bell towers, cemetery monuments, horsehair braiding and beaded bags can.

I suppose we all have reasons for wanting to preserve or destroy these sometimes haunting and sometimes haunted witnesses to our lives. So when people ask me why it's important to do what we do, I wonder aloud why it might be important to them or why not. Some see a conflict between saving the past and building for the future. And in some places there is. There aren't many uses for those tee pee burners and massive barns. I'd like to save a few like I'd like to own a big Kerry Moosman pot or an early oil of Ted Waddell's cows.

A friend of mine says it teaches you something when you can hold a paradox in your hands, not as a compromise but as something else. And there is truth in the need to remember the past and there is truth in the need to move on into an exciting and sometimes frightening future. I feel a little more secure standing on the strength of my past in the rolling short grass prairies of Dakota and Nebraska while leaning towards the next stage of my life in Idaho.

I guess the biggest compliment an Idahoan can give me is to bring me up to date on what's happening in their community when I arrive. We pick up from the last time I was there. I will miss all the amazing people who live in the towns that so trigger my imagination. I look back on those early days when I first started driving those 25,000 miles a year in Idaho. When I would pull a Richard Hugo and stop on the edge of each small town and imagine a past and a future for those who lived there. As he so beautifully said in "Making Certain It Goes On:"

We love to imagine that the drought has ended,
the high water will stay, the excess
irrigate the crops, the mill reopen, the workers
go back to work, lovers reassume plans to be married.

On many of those days I would buy a lottery ticket in the local store and dream the total renovation of the Wilson Theater or the Oneida Stake Academy or the exquisite Hurlbutt Mansion on the hill in Lewiston. And I would see the people coming and going from the places like they have and may well again. I would see the heartbreak and the joy. And I would try to hold the vision for them of a job well done.

So in the end, while I will leave my service to the Trust with much still to be done: the Nampa Depot and the Stake Academy and the Wilson need more money and the Sandpoint Depot is in transition and the Hurlbutt Mansion would make Kirtland Cutter sad to see this prize set empty, I think I've met my challenge to find the meaning of home and I will say, as Harry Magnuson is said to have said to his priest in his last days, "Father, the only thing that matters is love." For me love is home. And home is Idaho.