

## **DON'T RETIRE** ( on handprint vs. footprint )

Josep Vallverdú

My curiosity aroused on reading an advice given by Sir Alex Ferguson, during an interview: " When you get older, don't retire". Taken literally, the words convey a verdict of non-stop work, so to say. Does the seasoned coach intend to keep his job, until his mental engine softens or his heart comes to an end? This would not be advisable in any case, once you consider to what extremes such a decision might place the person involved.

What Sir Alex wanted to explain, I figure, is that he, at least, couldn't absolutely give out his job, because he knows no other. He, and plenty of older men, have been for a unique length of time outstandingly efficient in an exclusive field, kings of an activity that now they find no means to replace. The sole idea of changing his daily work for another is an insanity.

He also states that "retirement" , if carrying the need for "change" , is fit for young people, eager to start a new work from the display of prospects open to them. But for those who along their life kept a sole job, the prospect of changing in old age is out of range. This explains Mr Ferguson's discourse , the "moral of the sentence".

I understand well this situation because I know the consequences of retiring in people unable to undertake new activities to fill their time. Leisure then becomes unbearable. Fortunately i have not experienced it myself, on the contrary, I am fortunate enough to write, but i saw some examples of the sad situation faced by those who knew no other occupation than going to their post at his or her office, day after day. For those , the time ahead was a life sentence lacking sense.

A neighbour of mine was a Bank director. All his life he started his daywork at eight o'clock in the morning and after closing the doors in the afternoon, he stayed at his office, and got on working, reading reports, revising the stock exchange panorama, until six or seven, then



he met some friends at a bar for some time, and he got home ready to dinner.

This gentleman didn't read books, didn't enjoy cinema, could not exert any manualities, had no dexterity for mechanics, didn't collect stamps.... He stepped out into the street at ten in the morning and had no idea what to do. He read the newspaper sitting on a bench, then walked, swallowed a cup of coffee at a tavern, yawned, returned home for lunch... In a short time he fell ill and disappeared from this world he came to find hostile.

Certainly I know other kind of old people, active and purposely conscious of their social possibilities. They travel, they practise craftsmanship, study languages, are leaders of a group, read, or write their memories, without any literary ambition, in a simple style. To recall your life and put it onto paper you needn't be a Keats.

A new field is open to those experienced gentlemen and ladies: handprinting. Not in a literal, childish sense, spreading ink on your palm and applying it on a paper. No: the term handprinting was born recently, in opposition to footprinting. We speak of the disastrous results of mankind's pressure on Nature, its *footprint*. In a single century, the XXth, man destroyed more woods than in the preceding twenty, man polluted air, land, water, generated a gigantic amount of CO<sub>2</sub>, the atmosphere became warmer, polar ice is still now melting at a risky pace, animal and vegetal species are being deleted.

We are not yet in alarming danger, but this destructive pace must stop, and on this way actions of handprint are being undertaken by conscious, responsible, environmentalist minds.

By *handprint* we understand any action positive for conservation, replacing, redesigning what is being destroyed or damaged. Against the ominous footprint, fresh handprint. Feet destroy, hands build. A friend of mine, an old German, when in retirement, planted, watered and cared fifteen pines on a streetside. Now he is dead, the pines are now superb. That place seemed to ask for trees, and nowadays, when I look at them, those grown pines seem a homage to that handprinter..



Not all is lost, actions working to restore animal and vegetal species are in course. Some proclaimed: "Nature is dead". Wrong, We have means to counteract the destructive results of overfootprinting,

The world around us offers growing evidence that nature is more resilient than we have thought. Conservation is the first step men took: look at the natural parks and reserves, in 1950 there were 10.000 Ha of protected areas, now there are over 100.000. They say that nearly 13% of the planet's land has some form of legal protection. But we must find ways to allow wildlife to coexist with human development, not only be satisfied with the isolation of parcels of wildness.. To begin with, please, every time a tree dies, plant another. This will be a form of really intervene in the balance needed. Just by keeping the number of trees around us we enter the pacific army of handprinters. I know people on retirement who set about on actions of handprint, not only personally, but also giving advice, directing or helping others to act similarly. Their experience is the best tool.

Do you feel better, after reading on handprint?. You are already on the good way. Next step, non-stop.