Clio's Psyche

Understanding the "Why" of Culture, Current Events, History, and Society

Volume 13 Number 3 **December 2006**

Daniel Dervin's Suffer the Children Symposium

The Children Continue to Suffer

Richard Booth
Black Hawk College and Private Practice

Professor Daniel Dervin, "Suffer the Children: Children in the Early Christian Centuries" (September 2006, pp. 81-86), constructs an interestingly complex, if somewhat disturbing, historical image of the salient perceptions about children and childhood during the early Christian centuries. I would like to comment on several them-

(Continued on page 145)

The Psychology of Retirement

Fantasies and Realities of Retirement

Paul H. Elovitz
Ramapo College of New Jersey

If we are fortunate enough to live into our fifties and beyond, as most of us are in the present era, what to do with the rest of our lives becomes an issue. Should we work as long as we can or retire to enjoy a well-deserved rest in our final years? If we retire what will we do with our time? Do we relocate, save for old age, or spend our money while

(Continued on the next page)

IN THIS ISSUE

Introduction …….....109

Considering Retirement.....115
Don Carveth, Norman Simms, Joyce Berkman, Howard Covitz

Deciding to Retire, Coping with Old Age, and Narcissistic Injury.....121
Sander Breiner, Peter Petschauer, Jerry Kroth, and Tom Ferraro

The Pleasures and Relief of Retirement.....127
Thomas Vasilos, Joe Illick, Edryce Reynolds, and Henry Lawton

The Retiree as Scholar.....133
Herbert Barry III, Dan Dervin, David Felix, F. Lincoln Grahlfs, and John V. Knapp

Women in Retirement…….....138
Hanna Turken, Vivian Rosenberg, and Ruth Neubauer

Conclusion……..…….143

Symposium Responses to Dervin's "Suffer the Children" (Published in September 2006)

Comments by…..……109
Jerrold Atlas *Paul Elovitz*
David Beisel *Harriet Fraad*
Richard Booth *David Lotto*
Sander Breiner *Paul Salstrom*
Michael Britton *Howard Stein*
Lloyd deMause *Nancy Unger*

Dervin's Response…….……..163

Victor Wolfenstein: Psychoanalytic-Marxist Scholar….165
Bob Lentz and Paul Elovitz

Jean Baker Miller: Memorial Essays
Teresa Bernardez……..……173

In Memoriam: Charles Gouaux (1936-2006)
Paul H. Elovitz……..176

Bulletin Board…….177

we can? Do we start a new career, get or enlarge a hobby, write the book we always wanted to, or travel while we are still healthy enough to see all the places we have dreamt of visiting? Will retirement be the "golden years" or will we soon be bored and succumb to ill health and an early death? Is this the time to fulfill old dreams or vegetate?

Fantasies about retirement abound. Sleeping late and reclining on a warm, beautiful beach while sipping an alcoholic beverage are thoughts coming to mind, especially in the face of demands for greater productivity, new procedures and technologies to be learned, difficult bosses, or cranky co-workers. Yet, I find most people I know are reluctant to retire, in part because so much of their identity is tied up in their work. Some of the ambivalence regarding retirement is reflected in the action of a friend who, while at work, wrote an e-mail to a close co-worker-friend discussing her thoughts about retirement and asking for total confidentiality, then "inadvertently" sent it to all of her colleagues. Clearly her computer slip reflected her unconscious desire to retire, which she soon accomplished. She values her retirement, filling her time with meeting the needs of her children and grandchildren, while spending more time with her friends and doing hospital volunteer work.

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What are the bases of the ambivalence about retiring? They include a sense of worthlessness, a loss of professional identity and status, the fear of being "out of the mainstream," and a feeling that leaving work places you only a step away from the grave. Furthermore, leisure is often associated with laziness. In our formative years, parents, teachers, and coaches warned us of the evils of lassitude. It may have been a terrible struggle to get up on time to go to school and work in our younger days, however, by the time we are thinking of retirement, we normally wake up before the alarm clock! Work and profession form key elements in identity for most people. Some men suddenly face major health problems or die not long after retiring precisely for this reason. The realities of retirement usually involve a sense of loss: loss of a routine, status, and friendships as well as pressure to perform.

For example, a colleague who was forced by ill health to retire in his early seventies keeps referring to his students in the present-tense, even though he has not taught in years. When we spoke recently, and on other occasions, he fumbled for words as he realized the incongruity of what he was saying; I encouraged him by commenting that he will always be a professor. Though his health problems devour more of his time and energy, as a "professor" he continues to correspond with colleagues, research, write, and publish.

This introduction will probe some of the intricacies of retirement and the related issues of aging, discussing issues raised in a number of the articles submitted by members of the Psychohistory Forum and other colleagues. Ambivalence about leaving work, changing identity and body image, declining capabilities, fantasies of retirement, loss, the role of love and work in retirement, and transgenerational altruism are some of the issues discussed. This introduction will use the case study method to illustrate various points.

Though my prime focus is on qualitative aspects of retirement, some hard facts provide a framework for the numbers of people impacted by retirement. In 1900 life expectancy in America was 47.3 years, while of late (2003 figures) it is 77.5

years (74.8 for men, and 80.1 for women). On average, a man at sixty-five can anticipate 16.8 additional years of life and a woman 19.8 years. In 1900 those over sixty-five were only 14.1 percent of the population, in 2000 12.4 percent and for 2050 the projection is 20.7 percent. Today, out of 300 million Americans some thirty-five million are at retirement age and beyond, a figure that is projected to reach ninety million at mid-century. The graying and retirement of Americans is a subject worthy of attention by all Americans, including psycho-historians.

An interesting case study of a man avoiding retirement is that of a seventy-two-year-old biological scientist named Erik, who rails against the aging process and says he wants to work until he drops dead on his job. It angers him that he cannot do the things he did twenty or even ten years ago. It infuriates him that he pays a high price in terms of his hurting body when he turns from his sedentary life in the laboratory—these days mostly in front of the computer—to repairs on his home and work in his garden. These activities used to offer him great satisfaction and pleasure. He expects his body to have the adaptability and flexibility it had in his forties and fifties. His wife's sensible reminder to be realistic regarding what he can now do and not do go unheeded: feeling that his slowed and thickening body has betrayed him, he stubbornly refuses to accept the new realities of his existence. Though he diets as part of a mostly vain attempt to stay in shape, he finds that even when he maintains the same weight his body mass shifts from his chest to his stomach, from muscle to fat. Erik curses at having to do stretching exercises every day. Part of the problem is that his self-image is as someone who can accomplish anything, no matter what the obstacles.

Erik's lifetime of achievement came through overcoming all obstacles in pulling himself out of poverty: no matter how tired and discouraged he felt he just kept on working. Denial of limitation has been a way of life. Furthermore, ceding some physical abilities is to him is like giving up and taking a step closer to the grave; a sense of worthlessness is connected with retirement. Sexual intercourse is important both for its own sake and as a way of proving his manhood as his muscles sag and his memory slows. He takes Viagra to assure his performance, but his wife has little interest in sex, saying that her girlfriends have long since given it up. On those few occasions when they are intimate together, she makes it clear to him that it is out of a sense of obligation more than desire. As his sexual gratification diminishes, his sexual fantasies involving women half his age increase. When he fleetingly considers retirement, he fears that he will feel even more emasculated and that the balance of power in his marriage will shift to his wife, twelve years younger, since she will still be working. He is quite dependent on his spouse, but has strong counter-dependency feelings. In some moods he hopes he will suffer a massive stroke and die while still working so as to not have to face the prospect of retirement. At other moments, he has fantasies involving the guilty pleasures of giving up work. At his wife's insistence, he recently entered therapy. He thinks it is because of his pronounced tick, but she is concerned about his grumpiness, changing body-image and identity. It remains unclear how Erik will reconcile his conflicts over how to conduct the rest of his life, especially because he inclines to drive away the love of his life and he does not think he can live without work.

"Love" and "work" are, as Freud has taught us, two of the great challenges and forms of satisfaction in life. (Incidentally, Freud uses the term "love" some 1,500 times, "work" 2,009 times, and "retirement" only four times in his writings.) On the face of it, retirement takes work away, and death, divorce, or the single life increase the likelihood of love also ending. In reality, retirees incline to continue to work though not necessarily at the same pace or under the same circumstances. Thus, some who have worked for corporations like the notion of working for themselves in retirement while retired business owners may prefer that ultimate responsibilities be left in the hands of others. Volunteerism increases greatly in retirement.

The life and philanthropy of my friend Fred Ludwig provides an example of volunteerism in retirement. Born in New Jersey on August 15, 1927, as the middle of three sons of a German immigrant knitter and German homemaker, he worked in a bakery after school from the age of thirteen on. At seventeen in World War II, he felt the need to serve his country by joining the Navy's construction unit, the Seabees, seeing action during the bloody 1944 U.S. assault on Iwo Jima. Upon his discharge from

the military in 1947 he bought the bakery in which he had worked and ran it for a number of years. He also married a woman with a small daughter and together they had a son to whom he is quite devoted. Throughout his career, he worked as a baker and cook in diners and for various large companies in their cafeteria kitchens. In the late 1980s, after he was divorced and had met his second wife-to-be, Fred became concerned about having health insurance as medical problems began to appear. He found it easy to find work despite his age, since there were few people with his culinary skills, but before long had to quit to have a knee replacement although former and perspective employers continued to pursue him for years. However, he started liking the freedom of his retirement. Soon his away-from-home-cooking was focused on monthly meetings of the volunteer fire department he served in for fifty-four years as well as cooking for his friends. Since Fred came into her life eighteen years ago, his second wife has not had to even boil water.

Five years ago Fred's wife saw an advertisement for Santa Clauses and suggested he apply after he grew a beard. She also bought him a costume. The Santa Claus persona soon took over Fred Ludwig's life. At five foot ten (in his prime) and 290 pounds, Fred looks like Saint Nicholas even when not dressed in a red shirt—which is seldom the case. His huge belly, pure white wavy hair, handlebar moustache, long white beard, and benevolent smile make him as close to perfection in appearance as one can imagine in a fantasy Santa Claus. Though he refuses to ever take money for his work as Father Christmas, in two different years he also went through the expense and fun of going to Santa School in Michigan to hone his skills.

Even in July children, especially three- to seven-year-olds, ask their parents, "Is that Santa Claus?" The answer is "Yes." For Fred will eventually go to them, if they don't come to him first, and say that he knows that they have been "good children because Christmas is coming and Santa has been thinking of them." To break the ice with shy children he will often say, "Give me a high five!" After a little drawing out of the children and bantering with them and their smiling parents, Fred reaches into his pocket and gives the boys a miniature Matchbox car or truck and the girls a golden bell on a colored string they can wear around their wrist. Should the ten or fifteen of each of these gifts he keeps in separate pockets run out, there's a larger supply at hand in the car. To help assure parents that he has honorable intentions, he also hands out his card, "'Santa for Seniors' Fred Ludwig. Real Beard—No fee." The Santa business is thriving. Last year he went to twenty-seven nursing homes, played Santa at the firehouse, was the weekly resident Santa at the "Santaland" built by his volunteer fire department, traded being Santa with a supermarket to get cases of apples to give children who came to Santa, and, when not exhausted, even baked cookies to give away. This year for reasons of health he must limit himself to only two appearances a day in the extraordinarily active "official" Santa Claus season between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Like so many people in their older years, health is an important issue. Fred has had the following replacements: both knees, both rotator cuffs in his shoulders, one hip, and two lens replacements in his eyes. (Several of his many male friends joke about his being the Bionic Man who will next have a penile implant.) He has also had forty-five radiation treatments for prostate cancer, and, thus far, six chemotherapy treatments for bladder cancer. Despite these health problems he is quite vigorous, incredibly optimistic, and a good friend to those less well off. Most of his hospital visits are to sick firemen and the widows of dead ones. He tells them jokes for which he has a fabulous memory, and thinks little of driving across the country to visit his brother in California or his wife's relatives in South Dakota. When he suffers intense pain from the hip he was born with, as he does these days, he thinks he may have it replaced—after Christmas, of course. For his bladder cancer he chose the less invasive treatment which would not result in his losing the beautiful white beard, mustache, and hair before the new year. Fred Ludwig prefers to put smiles on the faces of young children, rather than to focus on his problems, buddies killed on Iwo Jima, or friends who have died more recently. At this stage of his life, Fred measures his worth by the smiles he puts on the faces of others. Intergenerational altruism helps get him out of bed in the morning.

Fred's wife is a seventy-seven-year-old psychoanalyst with no immediate plans to retire. Age, health restrictions, and the time needed to care for her sixteen-year-old grandson who now lives with

them have resulted in her cutting down her patient load from fifty-five or sixty hours a week to about twenty, plus conducting several groups. Instead of working all day and into the evening, she now mostly sees patients in the morning when she has the most energy. She no longer bothers dealing with insurance companies because of the frustration and time involved. (Diminished eyesight also impacts on decisions she makes.) After two knee and one hip replacement her mobility is somewhat restricted, but not her spirit. As a person, she is extraordinarily generous, in ways that are too numerous to mention here. Like her husband, she gains immeasurable pleasure from giving.

Most psychoanalysts and psychologists I know are slow to retire. Unlike carpenters, cable linemen, garbage men, plumbers, roofers, stonecutters, and others who rely on their brawn as well as their brains, physical disability is far less likely to force the issue of giving up their life's work. Long experience usually makes them better at their jobs.

Many people are forced into retirement because of changes in the industries and institutions they have served. Involuntary retirement is all too common these days in the face of foreign competition and corporate takeovers resulting in workers being displaced, businesses moving offshore, downsizing, making room for new technologies, or hiring different employees beholden to the new management. Politics results in many unexpected retirements. This week on November 8th, Senators Allen of Virginia, Chafee of Rhode Island, Conrad of Montana, Santorum of Pennsylvania, Talent of Missouri, and others were all retired by the voters, just as Jimmy Carter in 1980 and George Herbert Walker Bush in 1992 were retired. First elected as Senator from New Jersey in 1982, Frank Lautenberg tried retirement at age seventy-six in 2000, only to soon decide that it "was among the worst decisions" of his life. Thus, he jumped at the chance to return to the Senate when yet another New Jersey political leader's (Robert Torricelli) corruption caught up with him in 2002. Senator Lautenberg is far from alone in thinking retirement is a bad idea.

"I flunked retirement!" were the emphatic words of the newly named administrator of one Pennsylvania university whose forced retirement from business had included a golden parachute, leaving him a rich man: "Playing golf whenever I wanted was not the sheer pleasure I dreamed it would be. I was miserable staying at home, so after six months my wife said I had better find something else to do, since I was driving her crazy. Plus, she worried about my health." Our Psychohistory Forum Research Associate, whose brother works for this university, reports that several months after this conversation, the administrator addressed his employees portraying his transition from business to education as utterly seamless—simply the fulfillment of a lifelong dream.

It strikes me that early retirement, especially among what the gerontologists call the "young old," can bring a great sense of liberation, but what happens after the novelty wears off? "Snowbirds," who maintain their familial home in the north and head for the warmer climates in the cold weather, often find absentee ownership burdensome as they grow older. They have neither the time nor the energy to maintain both residences. Of course, there are some, like one of my well-provided-for widowed neighbors, who keeps her house in the suburbs of New Jersey mostly for its memories. She is not willing to make the decisions about giving up various pieces of furniture stored in it. Though she appears to be in her early eighties, her routine is to drive through the night to visit her children and grandchildren in Texas and Chicago and then spend most of her time in her retirement home in Hilton Head, South Carolina. As she begins to show signs of becoming frail, she has purchased a condominium in Dallas close to one of her sons and is preparing to sell her northern house—if only she can part with all of the memories every object in it represents.

The comfort of routine is important to elderly retirees. Their circle of activities and friends diminishes along with their energy. The goal becomes how to keep doing the old things rather than finding something new. This brings up the whole issue of creativity in retirement. While it is in their twenties and thirties that scientists make most of their great discoveries, the creative powers of human beings continue until the end of our days, though usually in diminished forms. On their deathbeds many could echo Winston Churchill's last recorded words: "I'm bored."

Philanthropy often serves the purpose of fulfilling unfulfilled dreams. George Soros (born in

1930 as György Schwartz), the billionaire financial speculator, grew up under Hungarian fascistic dictatorship, Nazi occupation, and Communism, dreaming of a freer and better life and world. His enormous wealth (currently estimated at $8.5 billion), gained partly from "breaking the Bank of England" in 1992, gives him the wherewithal to fund steps toward free and open societies in Eastern Europe. He retired from active running of his business to devote his final years to helping humankind achieve the freedom he dreamt of for himself as a teenager.

The Bronx-born multimillionaire high school dropout Russell Berrie, upon withdrawing in his final years from the active running of his manufacturing business, began funding colleges and universities close to where he lived and in Israel. All of his philanthropy required the maximum of publicity and some deference-paying by college administrators, men and women who normally had three or four more educational degrees than he had earned. He enjoyed their having to come to him and the honorary degrees that resulted from the funded programs and the buildings bearing his name in large letters. His negotiations with college administrators were as tough as with his business competitors as he sought to maximize his profits, as measured by his name on buildings and programs he usually only partially funded, while minimizing his financial expenditures. My sense was that this late philanthropist really enjoyed these "triumphs," proving in his mind that he was smarter than those "smart" kids who graduated high school and got all the fancy degrees. For their part, the college administrators were just happy to get the money for their programs and own personal professional advancement.

Gerontologists can offer some insights into issues of retirement. One of our Psychohistory Forum Research Associates who teaches gerontology devoted time to sharing some of the economic, sociological, and psychological aspects of issues of aging confronting the retired. She started by reminding me of the reality of retirement becoming a mass phenomenon only in recent times in rich, developed societies. Prior to that not many people lived long enough for retirement to become an issue. With the average life expectancy of Americans now seventy-seven and one half years, there are far more people at the age of retirement. In gerontology, distinctions are made between the "young old," "middle old," and "old old" (the "frail"). The "young old" are usually in good enough health to enjoy their retirement should they have sufficient funds and interest apart from their work. This is the time when the fortunate among them can do lots of travel or pursue a second career that previously had only been a dream. The "frail" are people who normally have lost mobility, need lots of support, and are typically within a year or two of death.

Our colleague teaching gerontology, whose generous sharing is characteristically cloaked in anonymity, reports: "poverty in old age is terrible. The poorer you are the less you retire and the harder your life is both in and out of retirement." The poor work as long as they are physically able to prior to relying on familial or societal welfare. She applies Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of death and dying to how people respond to loss of physical function, poverty, and severe illness in the latter years of life: denial/isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Denial of diminished physical function can only go so far, since the aging body has many ways of reminding its owner of its limitations, to say nothing of its increased need for maintenance in the form of stretching exercises and visits to medical specialists. Frustration and anger at these added burdens is a common response, especially among those who took their bodies for granted throughout their early years.

Realism and optimism are useful traits in retirement. Clinically depressed people do not survive as long as those who are optimistic about their lives, even without suicide being a factor. As is well known, married people live longer than single people and women are certainly far more durable than men. Women even survive the death of their husbands far longer than men do the loss of their wives. Late last year when I attended the funeral service for a ninety-three-year-old friend, there were a large number of her female friends in their nineties who appeared to be in very good health and who were quite lively. One of their drivers was a ninety-seven-year-old.

Our optimistic gerontologist advises those angry at the need for prophylactic exercising to think of the results of George Valliant's longitudinal research project in which for seventy years men who graduated from Harvard in 1920 were matched with those who went to work after high school. The

results led her to be able to tell her students who are thinking of dropping out of college that a college education will not only result in $10,000 more per year in income but also ten additional years in life. Furthermore, a study of workman's compensation claims reveals that college professors have a much lower rate than workers with physically-demanding jobs which they come to hate as they grow older precisely because their bodies cannot take the strain. It is no wonder that professors are slow to retire.

Retired professors often greatly increase their scholarly productivity because they can now focus their energies on research and writing rather than primarily on teaching and service to the university. Professors Dan Dervin, David Felix, and Lincoln Grahlfs represent prime examples of this phenomenon. Of course, the pleasures of academic retirement should also not be underestimated. This morning I received an e-mail from Leon Rappoport, a retired academic psychologist from Kansas State University who serves on our Editorial Board, who noted "that it was only after retiring from teaching ... that I have begun to really appreciate the scholarly intellectual quality of the university!" He goes on to write about "the pleasure of browsing the library, pursuing little projects for their own sake, and even perhaps a bit of *schadenfreude* as I commiserate with faculty friends over the latest administrative nonsense. I might even feel guilty about this if I weren't almost seventy-five" (of course, reprinted with Dr. Rappoport's permission).

Many psychohistorians are retiring to write more books and articles, travel, relax on the beach, and form new friendships. Others are working into their seventies and eighties. All of them, younger colleagues, and the educated layperson, should benefit from reading the varied approaches to retirement enclosed in the articles that follow. I hope you do as well.

Psychohistory Forum
Work-In-Progress Saturday Seminar

Lessons from the Holocaust
January 27, 2007

Isaac Zieman
With comments by
Eva Fogelman and **Flora Hogman**

Considering Retirement

Retirement Fantasies

Don Carveth
York University

I always imagined I'd be one of those people who would never retire, who would never *want* to retire, who would, in fact, *dread* retirement. Yet with less than three years to go until normal (now optional) retirement from the university, I may be ready to bring my career as a university teacher to a close.

Since we eliminated grade thirteen, the traditional fifth year of high school here in Ontario, the students keep getting younger. These days I'm getting seventeen and even sixteen-year-olds in my first-year classes. They're getting younger and I'm getting older. The cultural and generational gap just keeps widening. At times it feels as if I'm trying to shout across something like the Grand Canyon. Currently in my thirty-sixth year of teaching, I'm pretty sure that by my thirty-ninth, when I'll be sixty-five, I'll have had more than enough.

For those for whom stopping altogether seems too abrupt, my university offers a "senior scholar" option whereby one may take one's pension but continue to teach one course per year until age seventy. I might avail myself of that. But it's not as if I will be facing complete retirement when I stop teaching because, since the late 1970s, I have maintained a part-time psychoanalytic practice which I will continue. It's significant, however, that I have no desire whatever to expand my practice when withdrawal from the university gives me time to do so. I have a strong desire to pause and smell the roses.

For almost a decade I have been spending as much holiday time as I can manage at the beach in Florida and longing to spend more and more time there. I love lying under an umbrella with my wife on the beach reading detective novels, swimming and