

# **ARCing**

## **After Retirement Careering**

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### **Abstract**

*This essay illustrates a lifestyle that is becoming increasingly common, as life expectancy increases, and people no longer accept traditional conceptions about retirement.*

#### **1. Introduction**

Traditional attitudes towards retirement after a life long career were more or less along the following lines. At 65, an employee would be given a gold watch, and would then stay at home pursuing his hobbies, living off his pension and investments, doing what he wants. Within about 5 years or so he would get sickly and die.

I utterly reject this traditional model, and present here an alternative model that I call “ARCing” (After Retirement

Careering), giving my own case as an example of what is possible.

### *Increased life expectancy*

I begin with the growing phenomenon of increasing life expectancy. Recently I was looking over biographies of movie stars in movies whose trailers I could watch by the thousands (if I wanted) on my iPad. I was struck by how short their lives were. Many of them died in their 60s. In today's world we are much more health conscious. We know not to eat too much red meat, to avoid fatty foods, to eat lots of fruit and vegetables, to take multivitamins, to exercise daily, not to smoke, to avoid stress, to go for walks, to have friends, to have good relationships, to have lots of good sex, etc.

Personally, when I see an old person who is hobbling along, with smokers cough, arched back, and weak muscles, I don't feel sympathetic, I feel contemptuous – “Stupid ignorant fool! – He has ruined his quality of life by smoking, not exercising, not making his muscles strong, and now he is paying the price for his lazy ignorance. He will die young. Moron.”

In my own case, I am rather fortunate. I'll be 64 in 2011, and expect to live into my 90s. I say this because I very probably have longevity genes. My father is still alive at 92 with nothing wrong with him. His grandfather died at 97 and his great grandfather at 99. Everyone guesses my age

wrong by a decade or more, so lets assume I have 30+ more years of life. That's a LONG time.

## **2. Conditions for ARCing**

I do not intend dawdling around the house for 30 years, waiting for death. That would be stupid. Instead, I have decided to launch on a new career, hence the name "ARCing" (after retirement careering), i.e. a second major career, lasting decades, in what I call the "third third of life."

One of the secrets to long life and a healthy life is to feel challenged by some task, or goal. If ones brain is strongly occupied by a challenging task, one's body tends to be moved around a lot carrying the brain that is challenged, performing all the activities that the brain has set itself. A happily preoccupied older person will also be happier and hence less stressed, so should live longer as a result.

Everyone's personal circumstances, financial, emotional, marital, sexual, etc will differ, so it is difficult for me to generalize how people should go about ARCing. I can only give my own case as a possible model, and invite readers to perhaps be influenced by it.

### *Finances*

I start with finances. If you are poor and live from month to month on your monthly wage, then perhaps you cannot

afford to retire, so ARCing or conventional retirement may be out of the question. Obviously one needs to have enough money to be able to stop paid work, if you are to start ARCing.

In my own case, I have the savings of the 5 years I was a professor in the US. Since I now live in China I can afford a lot more easily to ARC, because the Chinese cost of living is about 7 times lower than in the US. I live very modestly, on about 1000 RMB (about \$150) per month. My aging father has invested well, so I should inherit a tidy sum when he dies, so I'm not too worried about finances in the long term. I could even live for another 30 years on my own savings, if I continue to live modestly as I'm doing now.

I have spent about a million dollars over my lifetime buying books for my library. I have about 12,500 of them. If I had invested that money in stocks or property, I would probably be a lot wealthier now than I am, but financial wealth is not so important to me as intellectual wealth, and in that latter sense I feel positively rich. I made a life style choice during my middle years and live now with the consequences.

### *Choosing a new career*

I suppose there is no necessity to *change* careers if you love the one you are in. If you live in a country where there are no ageist retirement laws (i.e. where you must legally retire

at a fixed age, independently of your capabilities. The US has had such anti-ageist legislation since the mid 1980s. Europe is only starting to do the same now, decades behind the US) then you can continue your current career as long as you like.

But, if you, like me, got bored doing the same thing for decades, then ARCing can be a most refreshing alternative. In my case I was a researcher in artificial brains. I was evolving neural net modules in electronics, very fast to assemble large numbers of them into artificial brains. I had no idea how my circuits evolved. They were a black box to me. I did this for 20 years, and became increasingly bored.

When I became a professor in the US for 5 years, I started taking Wal-Mart multivitamins and Omega-3 fish oil tablets for my concentration. The academic disciplinary training also helped my concentration (e.g. I did not have the luxury to tell myself a topic that I knew I had to teach the next day was too difficult and hence should drop it. I would not be able to teach a topic that was new to me, if I had dropped it as too difficult to learn, the night before.)

Another theory to explain my increase in intelligence (concentration?) in my 50s, was that perhaps the brain keeps on maturing, and rewiring all ones life. Perhaps my brain in my 50s simply went through some natural changes that were programmed in my DNA from birth? Who knows?

In my 50s, I felt I got smarter, rather than the reverse, which was a surprise. Most of my life, I was under the impression that people's brains aged, and got less sharp in older age. That was not the case with me. I may have become more forgetful, but I was able to tackle the heavy pure math and math physics that was a strong interest in my teens and early twenties.

For years, I had been buying PhD level texts on pure math and physics, telling myself, that in my retirement, I will have the time to really study all this "powerful beautiful stuff". Well, that time is now.

In the past 5 years, I have had two books published, so want to write a string of them in my ARCing period. I am now studying intensively, PhD level pure math and math physics, so that in a few years I will be able to write books on such topics as "Topological Quantum Computing" and "Femtotechnology". Pure math and math physics are the most intellectually demanding topics on campus, so they definitely keep me challenged. At times, they give me what I call "brain strain", but that is part of the challenge. If it were too easy, it would not be satisfying.

### *Life style change*

When one is working in one's "middle third" of life, one is usually an employee, and hence under the thumb of an employer, or managerial boss. One is NOT free to do entirely what one wants. One of the huge advantages of

ARCing is that suddenly you are free, and the feeling can be intoxicating. For example, in my case, I like working at night. I love the peace of the night, when I can forget about the noisy chaotic outside world, and can concentrate on my own thoughts and ideas, as they come tumbling out in the peace of the night. So, I wake up at about 2pm, and go to bed about 7am after sun up, using a sleeping mask to make everything dark. In the afternoons, if the weather is adequate, I take myself and a collapsible camp chair to my favorite beautiful park, and study my heavy texts until the sun goes down.

This lifestyle allows me to surround myself with the beauty of nature in the afternoons (see the photos section) and the peace of the night. I find it incredibly productive. I am a lot happier as a result and a lot more productive, even though in objective terms I'm definitely poorer. I don't have the income I had before which allowed me to travel a lot. However I am fortunate in that my ideas attract the attention of the world media, so I get invited several times a year to give talks or to participate in TV programs, with airfare, hotel, and often an honorarium paid, so I don't feel to be handicapped in terms of travel. Also, since I was making international trips about 2-5 times a year for 2 decades, I'm tired of sitting in airplanes crossing continents. I am quite happy to lower my traveling frequency, but I don't want to give up traveling entirely.

### **3. More global social effects of ARCing**

I can imagine that if many millions of people around the world take up ARCing then that will have a social impact, in the sense that the attitudes and values expressed by the ARCers will influence the “paid careerists.” I can imagine that the people in the middle third of life may actually envy the freedom of the ARCers and long for the time when they too can start ARCing.

Since we all have to eat and be sheltered, it is essential that people work and get paid to create the necessities of life. But, in the modern world, where technologies have made economic productivity levels so high, it is now possible for people to save enough to start ARCing earlier in life than was possible in earlier decades. In my case, for example (assuming I keep my health for the next 30+ years) I plan to have a major new second career that will last me three decades, a major block of time, and a major commitment in my life.

Because I’m free, i.e. wage free, I have no boss breathing down my neck, pushing me to do what he wants me to do. Hence the work that I do, is the result of my own choosing, so the pleasure level in performing such work is much greater than before. I live now with an intensity that I have not had before. I can recommend it strongly.

### *Health conscious*

Since I’m in my 60s, I need to pay close attention to my health, so I exercise vigorously for 15 minutes each night, to make my heart and lungs strong, as well as my back,



chest and leg muscles. This gives me a feeling of strength and bodily efficiency. A fit body gets less tired at the end of the day (or in my case, night).

It is also important to be slim, with a BMI (body mass index, that is in the range of 18-23 for optimum weight;  $BMI = wt(Kgms)/ht(ms)*ht(ms)$ ). To keep at this level, I eat just one normal meal a day, and fill up my stomach when I'm hungry with (bulky, low calorie) fruit. I am very conscious that to control ones weight, one needs to watch carefully, the total number of calories one stuffs into one mouth per day. By making meals fairly routine, in terms of their quantity, one can adjust that quantity depending on ones weight loss or gain, according to a daily weighing on the bathroom scales.

The number of years of happy ARCing one has will depend obviously on how healthy one keeps oneself. Hence to extend ARCing for decades, one needs to be very health conscious.

#### **4. Down sides to ARCing?**

Are there any down sides to ARCing? One immediate factor that I can think of, is that if one changes careers, then one is untested in that new career, so that the status level one has in that new career will be inevitably low, because one has not built up a reputation based on performance in that career. One can look on the new career more as a hobby. Since one is working wage free, one may not care

much whether other people value what one is doing while ARCing, since their opinions are less important than before when the opinions of one's bosses were critical for earning one's salary and not risking being fired.

For those people who are highly susceptible to the opinions of others towards them, the loss of status that accompanies career switching might be a problem. In my case, I am glad to switch, since I got bored and felt unchallenged in the last years of my old career. I'm rather a strong willed individualist by nature, and have gone my own way all of my life, so if professional pure mathematicians and theoretical physicists have never heard of me, I don't care. I'm not ARCing for their sake, nor to make money. I'm ARCing because I love it. I love the subjects that I'm studying, and that is really what matters. If one truly loves what one is doing, then life's happiness can only increase.