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Mindy Cameron

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Recommended Citation
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A Professional Writer Looks at Electronic Communication

Posted on March 1, 2003 by Editor

By Mindy Cameron <mindycameron@earthlink.net>

I schemed and dreamed about early retirement for many years, but I never imagined this. This is a life dependent on technology – laptop computer, Internet access, cell phone, Palm Pilot.

Ten years ago the dream was to live in rural North Idaho where summers would be filled with boating on Lake Pend Oreille, tending a garden, entertaining visitors. Winters would be a time to snowshoe, try my hand at woodworking, and read books in the warm glow of the wood stove.

Being something of a techno-phobe, I hoped my retirement date would arrive before a new wave of technology hit my workplace.

My, how foolish it all seems now. Not only did new technology wash over my workplace, my staff and I were the first to use it.

As retirement neared, pragmatism overcame fantasy. I yearned to live in the country, but I had no desire to become a hermit.

I was leaving family, including a young grandson and an aging father, behind. I’d return to see them, making that six-hour drive from Sandpoint to Seattle with some regularity. A cell phone seemed like a good idea.

At work, I began to appreciate as never before what it means to have an assistant to help keep track of daily details. I would learn to get along without Diane, but what about Microsoft Outlook? I couldn’t give that up.

I already had a little-used Palm Pilot, bought in a fit of shopping excess typical of the late ’90s. A future without staff support meant it was time to put that Palm to good use.
And that meant acquiring my own computer; no more using my husband’s. It had to be a laptop, of course, since I’d be travelling some. Retirement would not be cold turkey, after all. I would continue to write an opinion column for The Seattle Times.

Now, two years into my so-called retirement, I am more dependent than ever on the basic tools of technology. Still, I am a far cry from being a techie. By the standards of anyone reading this journal I am laughably behind the curve in hardware, software and computing skills.

My Internet connection is by modem, using the one phone line available, whether at home or at the office. Slow? Sure it’s slow. But I am supposed to be at least semi-retired, so what’s the hurry.

My husband has been telling me I need to replace my old IBM ThinkPad, which was used when I bought it. I resist. I’ve never been attracted to muscular machines, software upgrades, or cool gadgets, digital or otherwise. I’m living quite contentedly without a TV or microwave oven, for goodness sake!

This is not the retirement of my dreams, however, and that’s just fine. I turn 60 this year, and all of a sudden that seems much too young for dreams limited to gardens and woodworking, books and hikes. I am doing most of the things I imagined, and so much more.

I relish my life in the country, the calm serenity of the forest and meadow acreage where my husband and I now live. For the first time in my life I’ve become attached to a dog, a chocolate lab named Bradshaw. One thing I never imagined back in the city was raising a flock of chickens, the joy of the first egg, the sorrow of loss to a predator.

I am bound to a place – both land and community – now as never before, despite 20 productive years in Seattle.

There’s a lesson in this: In 21st Century America, retirees – early or otherwise – can have it both ways. If your heart’s desire is to live in the country and still connect to the world, you can do that with ease.

My new community, Sandpoint, Idaho, is no exception. It’s a town of about 7,000 people; another 32,000 or so live in the county. By urban standards, those are tiny numbers, but they are growing. Newcomers want the lakes and mountains and open spaces, but they also want high-speed Internet access. And they are getting it. I could have DSL; I just chose the cheaper – and slower – option.

Earthlink, my ISP, upgraded its server capacity shortly after I arrived. I must not have been the only one complaining on a near-daily basis about the difficulty getting online.

One friend here, also formerly from Seattle, runs a business out of a beautiful lakefront home with
satellite connection to the Internet.

My husband and I are working with others to establish a community-based nonprofit foundation to support the local public schools. Across the street from our office a business owned by another person with ties to Seattle soon will register, set up and host our organization’s website.

I no longer write regularly for The Seattle Times, but continue to work as a writer, editor and communications consultant. Between e-mail, online newspapers and that research assistant called Google I can find just about everything I need.

Recently, while completing a lengthy project for a client in Seattle, the editor and I worked long distance without once having to meet face-to-face.

I have a new attitude toward technology advances. I might even follow my husband’s advice and buy a new laptop this year. And while I’m at it, maybe I’ll upgrade my skills, too.

Two years in the country and I’m a changed person. If I can fall in love with a dog and get a kick out of chickens, anything is possible, even knowing a gigahertz from a megabyte, a CD-ROM from a DVD.

Mindy Cameron, formerly editorial page editor of the Seattle Times, is now a freelance writer living in Sandpoint, Idaho. She is a Pacific University alumna and member of the Board of Trustees.

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Adelaide Ronero
on February 6, 2014 at 1:40 AM said:

“Questo è il miglior consiglio su questo argomento e che hanno affrontato in un modo nobile”