

# Writer ponders her retirement

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By Dorothy Word

I have been awe-struck by Ben Carson ever since I read his two books, "Think Big" and "Gifted Hands". Dr. Benjamin Carson is currently Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore. A quantum leap for a "forty something" African-American male whose childhood began in Detroit's inner-city. Other than African heritage, Dr. Carson and I don't have much in common. But, as my teaching career ended, I found myself in a serious, non-medical situation called "Operation Retirement". Taking the One-Time-Only Retirement Package was a critical decision; the paperwork complicated; the stress unhealthy. Maybe not a life and death surgical procedure--but close !

When the "consent papers" were signed and retirement official, congratulatory cards poured in. My favorite one read: "Retirement has a lot of ups and downs. You get up when you want and you lie down when you want ". I certainly took advantage of that retirement option on those blustery, Arctic-like January days, as my friends with Real Jobs got up and went to work.

Looking out my window at the blowing, drifting snow, listening to the whistling and howling wind--my heart went out to everyone who had to be out in such harsh conditions. I thought of those jobs that can only be performed outside--such as mail carriers, and then I remembered a long ago, true story about Mary Fields--a very unique mail carrier.

It was in the 1890's when Ex-slave Mary Fields, at age "sixty something" took on the job of a U.S. Mail Carrier in Cascade, Montana. (How she got from her birthplace, Tennessee to Montana is another story). But Cascade, Montana where the snow gets "as high as an elephant's eye" was the mail route assigned to Mary Fields. Like modern-day mail carriers, nothing stopped her from getting the mail delivered. During severe winter weather, if the snow was too deep for the horses,

Fields donned snowshoes and delivered the mail on foot. Retirement?  
She never heard of it ! 336

The poet who penned: "Grow old with me, The best is yet to be",  
probably did not have retirement in mind, but, maybe the options  
that come with retirement. 365

I moved to Kokomo at the peak of the Thanksgiving-Christmas Volunteer  
Season. Nearly everywhere, there was ample evidence that this practice  
was alive and well in the City of Firsts. Of the many volunteers I 401  
heard about or saw in action--Emily, Jo and Clayton come to mind  
as volunteers par excellence. Emily, Jo and Clayton reflect the  
same work ethic that Mary Fields had. Retirement? No way ! Just  
switching jobs. 437

Emily, Jo and Clayton are skilled in keeping that delicate balance  
of volunteering without neglecting family and other obligations.  
I consider them great role-models. If I can hold on to the bliss of 471  
retirement, couple it with the joy of volunteering, it will require  
skill equal to some of Dr. Carson's surgical procedures. Solution:  
"Think Big" and place the delicate balance of retirement plus  
volunteering into "Gifted Hands".

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