

Is there Productive Life after Retirement?

By Tom O'Haver, Prof. Emeritus, UMCP

Published in the May 2014 issue of the University of Maryland *Faculty Voice*. Updated by the author January, 2022.

Retirement means going into cold storage, perhaps with tubes? Social and professional networks and the brain shrivel. Well, not for everyone! Professor Emeritus O'Haver is living the new retirement experience, that is, continued activity but without many deadlines and required meetings, and more flexibility in what one does when. Those who have retired or plan to do so soon will surely be encouraged by Tom's post-professorial life. It should be noted that O'Haver is writing from Naples, Florida, as the next snowstorm hits Maryland. – editor

When I retired from the University in 1999, after 30 years of service as a professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, I looked forward to spending more time with my family, traveling, and perhaps enjoying some craft or outdoor activity. I landscaped my back woods in Maryland (1) and my wife and I taught some adult education courses (2). But I also wanted to do something more related to my own training and academic interests, something that I would enjoy, that might provide some mental stimulation, and that I could do myself without a laboratory, graduate students, or post docs.

One ancillary craft that I enjoyed doing in my academic work in analytical chemistry was computer programming. I became involved with the laboratory applications of microprocessors when they came out in the 1970's, especially their applications to laboratory data acquisition, manipulation, and processing. Computer programming, it turns out, provides many opportunities for puzzle-solving challenges, at least as much as doing crossword puzzles, and as an added benefit, the results might even be useful to other people.

So, spending 3-4 hours per day in the quiet early mornings, I expanded and developed some earlier work into an online tutorial on computer-based data processing in Web (3) and printed (4) formats, and a collection of downloadable programs, scripts, spreadsheets, and working examples (5). Of course, there are commercial programs that do this sort of thing, but they tend to be expensive, complex, and difficult to learn. My programs are free, designed to be easy to use, and are well documented. No one likes to read manuals, so I provide my programs with lots of working examples and animated demonstrations, from the simple to more complex.

With a handy laptop computer, and with Internet connections available almost everywhere, I can do this sort of work almost anytime and anywhere, so my wife and I can keep on splitting our year (between Maryland in the summer and Naples, FL, in the winter) and traveling - to 50 countries on 5 continents (6). And the best part is that there is no fixed time schedule; I can work when and if I want.

Over the years, my work has been viewed and downloaded by researchers, instructors and students in 162 countries, most coming from Google searches. I have received thousands of emails with encouragement (7), questions, suggestions, and even experimental data that helped to correct, expand, clarify, and develop my material to be more useful for the needs of various fields of investigation.

By now, I have a total of 400 Mbytes of downloadable written material and programs, my web pages are viewed 500 times per day on average, and my programs and related materials are downloaded 500

times per month. Most satisfyingly, my programs have now been cited in over 600 publications, including journal articles, theses, and patent applications (8).

One thing that surprised me was the very wide range of research fields that have found my programs useful: industrial, environmental, medical, engineering, earth science, space, military, financial, agriculture, and even music and linguistics, based on emails, citing journal articles, and the ISPs of major web visitors. This goes far beyond my training and experience. However, judging from the ratio of downloads to emails, most people who have downloaded my software don't write me about what they are doing, which of course is completely understandable. Also, of the people who do write to me, most do not tell me specifically what their applications are, which is their prerogative. As a result, I have only incomplete information about the application areas where my programs are being applied. Those applications that I do know of are listed in (9)

Most interesting to me were the researchers who sent samples of experimental data from their own laboratories. This gave me the opportunity to work with types of data that I could never have encountered in my own work, and it was immensely useful in expanding the range of my programs and techniques.

Tom O'Haver Naples, FL

October 2017, revised January 2022

1. <https://picasaweb.google.com/tom.ohaver/TomAndMarySMarylandGarden#>
2. <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/adulted/>
3. <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/spectrum/>
4. <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/spectrum/IntroToSignalProcessing.pdf>
5. <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/spectrum/SignalProcessingTools.html>
6. <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/Travel.html>
7. <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/spectrum/SignalProcessingTools.html#comments>
8. <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/spectrum/papers.pdf>
9. <https://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/spectrum/applications.pdf>