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Your Life Your Health

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Life can be lived in reaction to events or it can be lived intentionally, as we anticipate and plan the future based on our values, hopes and dreams. On April 16, 2008, I sent the following note to my SETMA colleagues:

This morning, I intended to begin writing an address I will delivery on April 25th in College Station on Leadership in Medicine. Instead, I have spent some time “walking down memory lane” in SETMA’s history. As I have read a number of letters, papers and other documents which I have prepared over the past 20+ years, it has made me realize that as I approach my 65th birthday in November, in another 20 years I will be 85 years old. Unless I am blessed by God with extraordinary health and longevity, at that time I will be approaching the end of my productive career.

None of this alarms, distresses or depresses me. No one could have had a better life than I have had personally or professionally. Yet, the mile-stone of 65 years gives me pause to stop and evaluate my life and my future. It seems that at such times we ought to take some time and re-evaluate our lives. As a result, I am going to take the month of November for a sabbatical.

I am not having a midlife crisis and I will continue contributing to SETMA’s future in the same way that I have in the past. There is nothing I enjoy more than what I do with SETMA and I have never been more enthusiastic about the future of SETMA. But, I wanted to make this plan known to you seven months in advance so that we can make appropriate plans for this extended absence.

During this time, I intend to revisit significant places in my life and in my wife’s life. I have long wanted to write a book about my family from the perspective of the houses my family has lived in. I will revisit each of those houses and continue to collect material for that book. (By the way, there were three houses for my father’s parents, one for my mother’s, five for my parents and 12 for Carolyn and me) I will revisit all of the family of my father and mother’s generation on my side of the family and on Carolyn’s side.

I intend to spend time praying and reading the Bible. I will visit with people who have meant a great deal to my life. I will re-read *The Shadow of the Almighty*, which is the biography of Jim Elliot. This book impacted my life more than any other I have ever read. Jim was killed by the Acua Indians in 1954 in Ecuador.

I have asked God for a refreshing in my spirit and a renewal of my passion for spiritual things and for the things of eternity. I want a new vision for my life, my

family and for SETMA. I want to regain the passion for my personal relationship with Christ which I gained in October, 1961 when as a freshman at Texas A&M, I became a Christian.

It is my intent to return from that “pilgrimage” with renewed energy, focus and enthusiasm for our mission at SETMA and to balance that with the personal matters I have mentioned above. Lest anyone imagine that there is a message here which has not been spoken, there is not. I cannot imagine not being involved with SETMA and I know that I will be gravely tempted to cut my month short, but I shall not.

It my hope that SETMA is a blessing to you as it has been to me and that my continued participation strengthens and drives SETMA to greater heights.

On September 23, 2008, I followed this note with another which stated:

I had decided and had told my wife that I was not going to take the month off as I planned. One reason is that I felt that it would be detrimental to our goals and momentum at SETMA. Another reason is that I think a month will not give me enough time to do all of the things which I want to get done:

- Refresh my relationship with my wife who has been neglected since August 1, 1995
- think about the future of SETMA,
- and the rest of my life,
- establish a life-plan
- and goals to accomplish over the next 20 years,
- read through the Bible in a month which I have done on several important occasions in my life,
- take my wife to Europe where she has never been,
- visit all of the places in this country which have been significant in my life,
- visit all of my living close relatives,
- visit the gravesites of all of those whom I have loved and lost,
- spend extra and special time with my children and grandchildren,
- begin writing several books which are in my mind and which I want to put on paper before I am through:
 - one is a study of healthcare management based on lessons we have learned over the past fifteen years in SETMA and
 - Another is a history of my life experiences as viewed through the houses in which I have enjoyed the experience of “home,” – remember the size, smells, sounds and occupants of many homes in which I have been nurtured through my life.
- Re-read 5 books which are significant to me including:

- *We Are Not Afraid* (the story of 3 civil rights workers who were murdered in 1964),
 - *The Shadow of the Almighty* (the life story of Jim Elliott, a missionary who was murdered by the Auca Indians in Ecaqudor in 1954),
 - *The Last Lion Volume II Alone* (the second in a three-part biography of Winston Churchill),
 - *Fear, Slothfulness, Lust: Meekness, Humility, Gentleness* (an unpublished manuscript of a book I wrote about the categories of failures which face men and women and the solution to these problems),
 - *To Serve Them All of My Days* (A novel by British author R. F. Delderfield about a teacher)
- And, the list goes on

With Rick's encouragement, I am going to take this brief sabbatical. I think I can get a good start on the highlighted issues in the list above. I will schedule time for the other things later I have started planning a two-week trip to England and Scotland for Carolyn and me. We will visit all of the places related to Churchill and C. S. Lewis, along with many others which form the great heritage this country received from Great Britain.

Carolyn and I are looking forward to this trip and to this month together. I am not unaware of the burden this will place upon others. I know that in my absence for us to maintain the momentum which we have in many areas of our practice will require others taking leadership. I am confident that this will happen. Thank you for allowing me this privilege.

The articles for this column in the next few weeks will be reflections on the past and ideas about the future, as I work at living. None of us are promised another day, but if I have 20 or 30 more years, when I am 85 or 95, will I look back on these upcoming 20-30 years and wish I had done it differently? It is sobering to realize that in 20 years my children will be 55 and 53 and my grandchildren will range from 21 to 35 years of age. I can only hope that when I am 85, I will know many of my great grandchildren and if I should be blessed to live to 95 with my cognitive faculties intact, perhaps I will know my grandchildren's grandchildren. It is my hope that this present exercise will guide my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren to and through the living of a life of intention rather than reaction.