

My only criticism is that there is some repetition as with, for example, discussions of functional ageing disparities, but this becomes apparent only when reading the book at one sitting, so that perhaps one other ‘criticism’ is that the book is so eminently readable that it has to be read in one sitting. I have rarely come across a book on the included subjects so well written that I did not want to put it down until it was read to the end. This book is written with passion, and the authors do not hold back from trying to engage policy makers, ageing lobbyists, and researchers on alleviating inequalities in later life. Yet it is one that is grounded in the real world, with persuasive suggestions on how to improve the lives of older people, and how, if not to completely eradicate inequalities, at least to even them out.

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Eileen Carnell and Caroline Lodge (eds), *Retiring Lives*, Institute of Education, University of London, London, 2009, 180 pp., pbk £15.99, ISBN 13: 978 0 85473 848 9.

This book suggests that it ‘is different from others in the field of ageing’ (p. xii). This difference is shown by the prominence of a collection of 14 personal narratives. The editors see these stories as helping readers ‘to think about ... retiring and [to] help them in their own planning’ (p. xiii). They are also meant to ‘provide an experiential dimension that goes beyond conventional, qualitative accounts’ (p. xiii). The editors clearly want to provide sympathetic insights into thinking about retiring, and about retirement itself. Underpinning this is an approach to retirement based on purposeful planning and critical reflection which clearly draws on the academic background of the contributors.

The opening section begins with a chapter by the two editors that overviews the individual stories and attempts to identify some important themes, which provides a useful context to the stories that follow. Lodge and Carnell suggest that finding support in the process of retiring is important, and consider what it means to ‘retire successfully and happily’ (p. 5). The editors therefore explore what factors influence the decision to retire and whether to continue or not with some form of paid work. In doing so, they consider what retiring means for different people and how it can provide opportunities for purposeful, valuable and satisfying activities. This is, however, followed by some thoughts on the ‘dark side’ of retirement, which includes the impact of ageing, health, bereavement and death. The dimensions outlined in the introduction are well reflected in the narratives, which vary in style and content. For example, Jennifer Evans’s account focuses on being able, post-academe, to spend more time with her grandchildren and it includes two of the favourite recipes that they cook together. Jennifer also lists exercise, holidays, exercising the brain, community involvement and time for friends as key aspects of a happy retirement. Jennifer ‘is still doing a small amount of research and report writing’

(p. 84). She argues that, since her retirement, she can choose how to spend her day.

The impact of having been an academic is more evident in Eileen Carnell's account of her retirement, which can be read as a sort of research project where the focus happens to be the author herself. Eileen reflects back over six years of planning and preparing to retire, describing how the concepts of transitions and transformations have been crucial to her own sense-making. She notes, 'The most important thing I have learned is that retiring is an active process – a series of transitions and transformations' (p. 60) and concludes 'I am glad that I am retiring. My life seems full of the things that I really want to do. I feel more alive, more powerful, healthier and with a heightened sense of awareness of my personal relationships. It is a joyful period of my life' (p. 68).

Eileen's story highlights a process that she is able to control, but for many people retirement is not so manageable. None of the stories in this book reflect the experience of those who do not have enough cash on which to survive. However, there are instances where illness or disability threaten to de-rail the carefully planned process. The clearest example of this is provided by Diana Leonard. Diana started with a plan (p. 112): 'My intention was to just step into "retirement" with minimal changes to my life. I would just continue what I enjoyed in academic life', but it was necessary to modify the plan following a diagnosis of cancer and successive bouts of debilitating chemotherapy. As Diana notes, 'I am beginning to accept that I am no longer and will never be again "doing the same things as before but without the bits I don't like". I am somewhere different' (p. 116). The concluding section includes activities that can be used to assist in thinking about and planning for retirement. There is also a section on finance and one on 'reasons to be cheerful'. The appendix includes an 'annotated bibliography' that includes novels, poetry collections, biographies and films which the authors have 'found helpful in thinking about retirement and how we want to live our lives' (p. 168).

I have mixed feelings about this book. The stories are engaging and sometimes inspiring, but I wonder if, given the pace of changes brought about by the economic recession, the picture of retirement portrayed in this publication will be at all recognisable in five or ten years time. With the state pension age being increased and with fewer workers in protected final salary-related schemes or saving for a pension, in the no-so-distant future people may look back with envy to when the lucky ones used to have a comfortable retirement. Nevertheless the audience for this book is potentially diverse. It will be of interest to people thinking about their own retirement, and to others who give advice about retirement. Finally, *Retiring Lives* offers thought-provoking material for gerontologists concerned with the development of personal retirement narratives.

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