

## Enjoy it when you have time to do what you want

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Be forewarned, today's column is going to get syrupy. With warm and fuzzy stuff such as giving thanks, thinking positively and reaching out to others.

Today, the first Sunday of 2005, seems the ideal time to make a resolution that will have a tremendous positive impact on our lives: Resolve to look at retirement with optimism, as a journey to be filled with wonderful adventures.

"I don't mean to be corny, but I do think that gratitude for what we have is a strong starting place, and the New Year is a wonderful time to take stock," said Ellen Freudenheim, author of the just published *Looking Forward: An Optimist's Guide to Retirement* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, \$15.95). Next, she advises, "recognize retirement as a gift of time, a stage of life in which to innovate."

In our column last week, written before we knew of Freudenheim's book, we talked about our resolutions for the New Year, all having to do with learning, exploring and reconnecting. Today, after reading her book and talking to her, we want to emphasize an overall theme of optimism and reaching out.

"People who are in retirement have in most cases 15 to 20 to 25 years of reasonably good independent living ahead of them," Freudenheim said. "That's really a long time. What I am trying to say is retirement is not an endless stretch of desert road, but it is a journey that can be filled with wonderful adventures."

For her book, Freudenheim talked to more than 200 men and women, ages 45 to 90, about their own retirement journey, from a breast-cancer survivor who realized a dream of dancing onstage in her 70s to a mother of three who didn't take up running seriously until her mid-50s but had since run eight marathons.

Our goals may be less ambitious, but the underlying principle is the same -- discovering what we truly want to do, then going ahead and doing it.

"We all have this 'things-we-always-wanted-to-do' list in our lives," Freudenheim said. "I would advise people to sit down and really think about it."

You may go about this process of self-discovery many different ways, from writing things down and keeping an idea log to discussing your dreams with family or friends, or even hiring a professional counselor or life coach.

Once you have your dream list written down, you need to do a "reality check" about resources and limitations. If you want to learn to play the piano after age 60, for example (as Humberto wants), you'll almost certainly never be a Liberace.

But you can still have lots of fun and, if nothing else, deepen your appreciation and enjoyment of music. You may also want to start learning with an electronic keyboard

first, as Humberto has, before you go to the trouble and expense of buying a piano.

The beauty about being retired (and older) is that you don't need to answer to anybody, and can go fulfilling your dreams your own way. Not being afraid to change or fail can be a liberating experience.

Another way to add joy is to reach out to others, which you can do in numerous ways from volunteering to making the most of the countless accidental contacts we have with other people day in and day out.

"When you feel sorry for yourself, it's an awfully good thing to do to help someone else," Freudenheim said. "It's corny, but it's true." And volunteering "doesn't have to be every day for 10 hours," but can be a few hours a week at a local school, library, hospital or any other place or organization you care about, Freudenheim said.

Besides doing good things for others, volunteering adds to your social contacts.

"Not everybody needs tons of people in their lives," Freudenheim, "but everybody needs people." Even the people we simply "intersect with," Freudenheim said -- the person from whom we pick up our dry cleaning or our prescription drugs can enrich our days if we only take the time to exchange a few words and get to know something about them.

Finally, Freudenheim asked us not to end our column without mentioning the importance of regular exercise.

"I cannot stress how important physical activity is a mood elevator," she said, and as daily walkers we can attest to that. "It doesn't have to be in a gym, it can just be a vigorous walk. If you had a dog, you'd walk it around the block, wouldn't you?"

See other columns by Humberto Cruz in Monday's Your Business section and Wednesday's Business section. Humberto Cruz can be reached at AskHumberto@aol.com and Georgina Cruz at GVCruz@aol.com, or c/o Tribune Media Services, 2225 Kenmore Ave., Suite 114, Buffalo, NY 14207.