

3-7-10 Longevity: What Is It Worth

It has been said that our looks, our teeth, strength of character and longevity can mostly be attributed to our genetic heritage. So, we should choose our parents carefully.

Well, of course, we don't have that opportunity, but we do have the opportunity to choose how we take care of those teeth, where we apply our strength of character and, in general, do the best with what we've been given. And when we apply that kind of determination to our life and our work, in a sense, we are choosing parents; not ours, but those of the next generation. Today's decisions will direct and determine what the next generation inherits.

There are tough decisions being made everywhere, as to what our children and grandchildren will be given as tools and resources for their lives. I hope those with the power to decide are wise enough to leave some resources for the long run, in addition to what is needed for today and tomorrow.

A long time ago, I don't know when, some municipalities decided to acknowledge people who had been earning their living in the same town for a long time, by awarding them a longevity payment. I say earning but, I suppose, that is not automatic or to be assumed. Someone could have been just sitting around for long time. Maybe someday, the towns with long haul rewards, will switch to a review method and reward achievements and performance, along with longevity. After all, being there for a long time means good things like training and experience. For now, the temporal reward system, albeit a small one, is still in place.

I learned about this system only recently. When I met with the Finance Committee last week to talk about the three percent budget cut I submitted, one of the Fin/Com people asked, "What is this "Long" thing on this pay schedule?" The accountant explained that he would be seeing lots of those. It stands for "Longevity". After ten years of service, the person is given \$150 extra that year. It grows over the years, with many others receiving \$1,000 or more. The Fin/Com guy mumbled, or was it grumbled?...hmmm....

That was my pay schedule he was looking at. The abbreviation for longevity had been pre-printed on the sheet. I filled in my pay, according to the town's grade and step laws for wages and didn't give it a thought. I did not know what I meant, either. At the meeting, though, with the attention going to that extra item, it was then, at that moment, that I realized I had been the health agent for the Town of Halifax for ten years, as of March 7, 2010.

It's been an interesting and rewarding journey and we've come a long ways in that time. I hope people believe I have earned my pay. I hope we don't go back to the days of only stomping out fires, as they pop up. It seemed like that when I arrived. Jump here and there, in response to calls coming into the office: an overflowing septic system, a dog bite, a rabid animal attack, a housing complaint, inspect the kitchens and sample the pond water. Answer the phone.

Answer the questions. And meanwhile, the data entry was piling up ever higher and it was time to get the permits for businesses, installers, and inspectors typed, printed, signed and mailed.

It wasn't until the hours were increased for the health agent position and the time-consuming administrative work was recognized, that we were able to have some sense of stability and direction, as opposed to barely keeping our heads above water. What a difference between those two experiences!

Abraham Lincoln said, "And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

I am looking forward to serving and protecting, as I continue the life of a health agent. In fact, I think I'll raise a glass of something festive and bubbly. I salute my board and administrative assistant, for consistently supporting the life in our years as public health servants.

Make that a long drink, with a capital L for Longevity, in a tall glass.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Town of Halifax, MA. You can tell her what you think of being rewarded with \$150 after ten years by contacting her at 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us