

DeMONT: There should be scouting for seniors

John DeMont (jdemont@herald.ca)

Published: Sep 27, 2018 at 6 a.m.



John DeMont worries about retirement and the looming threat of idleness. - Scouts Canada



I'm fearful of conventional retirement: waking up one morning with no labors to perform, which means that the stuff I normally do after work is now complete by, oh-I-don't-know, 10:30 a.m., leaving the rest of the day to open like a chasm.

Now you may find this an laughable lament for a man who types for money, who, it can be argued, does not know what honest work is.

But I worry that Patrick Modiano and Michael Ondaatje can only write so many novels, and that the list of Scandinavian crime series on Netflix is finite.

I fear that most of my real hobbies, karate, tennis, are physical, meaning that I'm just a blown-out ACL away from packing on 60 pounds, and sinking into one of those deep funks to which males my age are prone.

I worry, as well, about a growing trend I read about on the weekend, in which lonely, suddenly aimless, retired men—women are apparently far better socialized—band together in literal or figurative “sheds” to wile away the hours in the company of other retirees.

I know, I know, First-World problems: Encase yourself in spandex and join one of those bicycling pelotons. That 's what volunteer work is for.

Except I fear my challenged attention span just requires more.

Which is why, when I went on again in this vein the other day my wife said four words--Boy Scouts for Seniors—which got me thinking.

She didn't mean adopting the scouting uniforms which, despite a recent redesign, still make me think of the Priory of Sion.

But there's nothing wrong with singing Oh Canada while in a horseshoe formation and having a flag raising ceremony as those scouts tend to do.

Their "be prepared" motto, as I understand it, refers to being in a state of readiness to do your duty in the service of some greater good, which is a worthy aim for anyone at any age.

Mainly, though, she was talking about the merit badges, which an enterprising scout earns for doing nifty stuff like leading a dog sled expedition, building a time machine, or learning how to make rum from chanterelle mushrooms.

No scout has likely ever earned a badge in these ways, but I hope you get my point.

There are some people, as hard as they try to be "in the moment", who still need at least the facade of self-improvement.

This can be achieved through organizations like the Seniors College Association of Nova Scotia, which will teach you about worthy things like the philosophy of Ayn Rand, the evolution of the guitar, and the history of money.

I know my life would be enhanced knowing about those matters, as it would being educated by my old reporting buddy Kevin Cox, now a United Church minister, about media issues in Mahone Bay, and getting the low-down on Queen's County from a variety of experts in Liverpool.

Except what I really just want to do is to fill in the gaping holes in my knowledge and skill-set, while there is still time.

So, what I seek, is some grasp of practical matters. The kind of thing that might earn a person a Scout merit badge.

I would like, for example, to finally know my way around in the woods--this badge could feature Michael Palin in the Monty Python's "I'm a Lumberjack and I'm Okay" skit--to know where to pitch my tent, how to cook a tolerable meal over an open fire, how to find my way back home when my cell phone dies.

I would like to learn how to be a better driver, to know how to steer when hydroplaning, to fathom how drive a manual transmission without stalling every time I go up a hill.

I would like someone to teach me how to make a really good toast--I envision a badge featuring Ryan Gosling, playing that goofy character in The Nice Guys-- because that becomes an indispensable skill as we age and the wakes and retirements mount.

I would, as well, like to know how to finally tell when meat is done, how to fix a bike flat, how to start someone's heart when it stops.

A well-rounded person should know how to do all of these things.

Boy Scouts for Seniors. It has a ring to it.

On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to recommend The Chronicle Herald?
